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INSIGHTS INTO THE BHAGAVAD GEETA

Dr. K.S. Narayanacharya

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**KAUTILYA INSTITUTE OF
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MYSORE**

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INSIGHTS INTO THE BHAGAVAD GITA

(A MONOGRAPH)

Dr. K.S. NARAYANACHARYA



**KAUTILYA INSTITUTE OF
NATIONAL STUDIES
MYSORE**

INSIGHTS INTO THE BHAGAVAD GITA
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Published by
KAUTILYA INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL STUDIES
977, Geetha Road
Chamarajapuram
MYSORE 570 005

© Author

First impression - May 2009 (500 copies)

Price: Rs. 80/- (Rupees eighty only)

Copies also available at:

SRI K.S. BADRINATH

27, Srishtidhama Apartments, "Sri Ayodhya"
1st Floor, AECS Layout, Sanjay Nagar
BANGALORE - 560 094

Typesetting
SPEEDPRINT SERVICES
MYSORE - 570 009

Printed at
PARIJATHA PRINTERS
MYSORE - 570

Dedication

To

All lovers of the Gita

*who
have respect for life, and who like to
have a positive approach
to its many problems
without
losing Faith and Hope
in the Divine Forces that
shape our individual
and Collective lives*

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PREFACE

The spiritual 'market' of today is overloaded with all kinds of books on the Bhavad Gita, so that a confused and bewildered novice does not know what to buy, how to approach the text, from what angle, how to sift the views expressed in them, which are sometimes divergently opposiste, some of which may have valid metaphysical foundations, while others are free-style interpretations, unmindful of self-contradictions, and are often irrelevant to our present situations in actual life. It is true that spirituality is anathema to a large section of our youth who are content to engage themselves in unavoidable conditions of a competitive life where money, comfort, security, power, prestige and a hundred other puerile considerations, leave the young evaported of any thirst or quest for the discovery of the meaning of life, its true ends, the lasting values of peace and fulfilment and so on. Competition is all! How to 'get on' is the problem on hand. If the Gita or any other text of philosophy helps this or that candidate to cope up with other competitors, it is welcome. Otherwise wht is the use of 'other-worldly' texts which tell us that life is unreal, individuality is a mirage, or that all is predetermined, and that life is a helpless and doomed struggle and that failure stares us in our face? - this is the attitude of most people today to earnest philosophy.

It may not be uncharitable to say that many find in this fertile field of frustration, opportunities for making 'quick money' by telling the bewildered aspirants that success is cheap, comfort is effortlessly available, and that health or other considerations are at your command if you can follow some dozen or two dozen principles, formulae, ideas that are advocated in particular books marketed by vested interests. All sorts of ideas are being

advocated in the name of the Gita today, as in the name of Yoga of yesteryears! It seems that humanity cannot live without seasonal crazes! And the crazy are willing to sell these brands for the gullible but rich! The art of writing books without saying anything substantial on the matter announced on the wrappers, is contagious, and is worldwide. The Bhagavad Gita is the latest version! Nobody reads ancient Commentaries, because Sanskrit is branded as a 'dead language'. (Call it 'Classical' pompously!) Breathtaking analytical volumes are looked at derisively - those of Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. They are dubbed as verbose; and what is not 'verbose' when you have only works in your hands without the signified meaning behind for which you were neither prepared nor eligible.

The present work is not one of these pretensions readily available in the market. It is hard philosophy which cannot be simplified below an irreducible minimum. It expects the reader to raise himself, and lends him a helping hand. It is an 'introduction', if you are willing to look at it that way. It is 'insights' if you are looking for openings, into a world of wisdom surrounded by a 'web' of ancient language or terminology, raised by the context of an immortal epic that has made a permanent difference to our culture. The Gita is a 'must' for you if you want to understand the Hindu psyche, and the larger human situation of which the Gita is an archetype. There is no deception here, in this book, either in terms or concepts or misinterpretation made on preconceived meta-physical frameworks. There are no pretensions here of 'higher' philosophy (meaning luxuries of wasteful thoughts appealing to idle minds looking to the past or the future and avoiding the present) for making life purposeful and joyful.

The attention is primarily concentrated on the core concepts of the Gita like cooperative living, balancing bodily and spiritual forces, human nature - how to mould it, trim it, and prepare it for evolution to its fullness which is a legitimate claim of life as ordained by higher spiritual directive forces - explication of terms and

concepts of the earlier Veda and Vedanta literature in modern phraseology, like **Yajna, Dana, Tapas, Lokasangraha, Tyaga, Sannyasa, Prapatti, Stitha prajna** and so on. Naturally this adopts a positive attitude to life and an assertive attitude to the solving of its manifold problems. Life is a struggle, yes; but not a vain one; it is the struggle of the Good over Evil, of Truth over Falsehood, of Beauty over Ugliness, of Immortality over Mortality, of Light over Darkness, and this direction runs through all the Vedas as their central thought. The Gita is only a restatement in the language bereft of ritualistic symbology, or ambiguous spiritual terminology.

Therefore in bringing home this message to the modern reader, the author of this Monograph has avoided using explanations from Commentaries that tend towards Illusionism (Mayavada) and Determinism (absolute and rigid non-relational Realism) that make no room for evolution in life.

In an honest survey of Indian thought, one can find this emphasis in our two Epics, the *Bhagavata* and *Vishnu Puranas*, after the Vedic literature, followed by the Pancharatra school of thought, of which the principal exponents happen to be the Alvars of South India, and the Vaishnava tradition illustrated by Ramanuja, his predecessors and followers. It is for this reason that this book has used Ramanuja's Commentary and Vedanta Desika's Gloss on it, mainly, and has absorbed intuitions by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo. This should not be misconstrued as 'school-affiliation', by vested interests. It is the Gita in which we are primarily interested, as the light by which we are to live and live in fulfilment. That fulfilment does not come by an 'empty-yoga', as is being advocated by quacks to the ignorant Western and Westernised minds. I have met dozens of Western scholars in the last one year - from Holland, Sweden, Germany, France and Italy, even from Algeria, Argentina and the U.S.A. - who have told me with one voice that Christianity is dead in the West and that they would not like the vacuum to be occupied by Islam or more deadly forms

of 'Religions' advocating and exporting terror as God. True, Westerners are fed up with the very notion of 'God' in the context of what Christianity and Islam have done to the world in the past few millenia. They want peace, positive approach to life, and meanings that can elevate in Arts, Sciences, Aesthetics, Yoga and Eastern thought. This process had started even at the time of the second World War but is now picking up momentum as never before. What are we to tell our Western fraternity? That life is an illusion? That man is bound to predetermined, and cruel destinations? That man cannot evolve?

Our Indian savants have to do some deep self-searching here. We may avoid the word God, if it means Jehowa or Allah to minds that have terror-stricken associations with these words. We have better concepts in **Brahman, Purushottama, Param Atma, Param Jyoti** and a variety of Vedic and Upanishadic terminology. God as relational, the world governed by freedom and initiative, with scope to self-evolve or self condemn, and the scheme of life as guided by Cooperation, and Spirituality – not as extra cosmic – but permeating all and each speck of dust, spirituality that is not dry, but responsive, benevolent and not indifferent in the name of objectivity, order and excellence as ever emerging factors of life that we often tend to push into chaos, individually and collectively – these are what the world cares for today. We have these and many more aplenty in our Vedas, Upanishads, Gita, Brahma Sutras, the Epics, Puranas and so on. Alas! This however, is not the picture given to the muddled West sine the time of Max Muller, Deussen, Whitney, Wilson, Weber and William Jones, their followers in India, among our scholars. When Tilak pointed out that Right Action as Karma Yoga was the main theme of Gita, many frowned on him! What else is the bold background of the Epic? Many think it not necessary to read the Mahabharatha, to understand or interpret the essence of Gita! That is the blunder avoided in this booklet of mine! Indeed that is our starting point, the Central

scene of the unfolding spiritual drama, in the theatre of the Gita. Whenever doubts arise, we go to dozens of utterances in similar contexts to determine the accurate meanings - what Verity has done to Shakespeare's plays, supplementing meanings from mutually similar contexts in all those plays.

It is a pity that even this much of honesty is not to be seen in attempts to hang on pet theories, preconceived, on the thought structure of the Gita, in the past few centuries. Does the Gita have a unified thought-core, thought-pattern? Can we call it philosophy?

It depends on your meaning of the word 'philosophy' which in its original Greek context means simply 'love of wisdom'. Why it should be expected in a propositional language, with explicit logic, as in Locke, Hobbes, Des' Cartes, Kant, Leibnitz, Hegel and Aristotle is beyond any sensible man's understanding. Unity is **implicit** in Nature, not **explicit**. The Cosmos does not teach you as a pedagogue in a feudal or medieval grammar school, nor as a sceptical experimentalist in a dry or dessicated laboratory. These are our own creations. But meanings from life are abundantly available to hearts willing to learn, and receive those signals. You do not have to be an engineer to press a button on your 'remote' to tune the channel of your choice on a T.V. set. A willing mind, and a technique appropriate to connect it with cosmic forces is enough. That is how the Gita teaches. Take the meaning of the tree turned 'upside down' (in Ch. 15) for example. The analysis of the "field and its knower (Ch. 13) is another if you want. The cosmic vision of Time (in Ch. 11) is yet another if you want. The flowing of rivers into an unperturbed sea (in Ch. 2) is still one more.

The Gita is mainly a poem with art as an instrument to convey divine concepts as 'perception' for those endowed with the power of the Inner Eye. It is philosophy in the full Indian-Hindu-sense of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Why should it conform to the conscriptions of an eccentric coterie of European

‘scholarship’ who arrogate to themselves the position of the Centre of World-thought?

Philosophy as metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, mortal guide-book leading you towards fulness, without tiring you in tedious logical subtleties, elusivist approaches of partial vision and lapses of finite visions, is welcome, we hope, always, on this earth which needs that guidance eternally. Our times are especially eligible to receive such help, when there is thus renewed interest in Hindu thought, in the West as well as in the East, we should put the best things in it in the right focus.

That is what this booklet humbly claims to have attempted. Philosophy requires constant updating in the application of eternal values to the changing circumstances of life. We must first have a good grasp and grip over the present circumstances and their needs in social, political, spiritual terms and then see which among the multitudes of streamlets of thought can suit us. It is thus seen that the approaches of Ramanuja and Sri Aurobindo require immediate application to Gita thoughts. Others may have suited other times; perhaps not also. That is no longer our concern. Let us leave them to the care of historians, scholars who can afford to bestow “equal” attention to all kinds of thoughts at leisure, without caring to apply them to actual life. Even in scientific thinking it is application that is never lost sight of, and the days of luxury of idle scientific research, or accidental discoveries are over. Words may look harsh and unpleasing; but cautious, we must be.

The booklet is in your hands. Please see how best you can use and apply these thoughts in daily life, a large part of which consists of mutual relations.

PROLOGUE

Meanings are not static. For, they spring in a world of mutual relations. Time there was, when 'Time' meant 'Time' and 'Space' meant 'Space'. Quantum science has shown that these are mutually exchangeable terms of measurement and cognition in our more precise understanding of the nature of the same world once inhabited by our forefathers. This is no misinterpretation, no overreading, no distortion or 'subjective' understanding of a 'purely objective' world. Science shows that these are pure 'abstractions' useful in calculations that do not have a direct bearing on reality in our actual terms of experience.

The *Gita* was taught more than five thousand years ago on the battlefield of **Kurukshetra** to an enlightened 'fool' who wanted to run away from the field of appointed duty on the pretext of compassion to erring elders and wicked warriors bent upon destroying the world in confirmed lust for power and pelf. Sri Krishna taught him that the greater question involved was the evolution of man, both individually and collectively from the lower impulses of brutality, and that compassion, heroism, asceticism, positive action, administration, abdication, elimination, war, violence and peace have to be viewed from that higher perspective whose contexts keep on changing intermittently in our movement of life.

Our Indian historical periods of ethos went on changing cataclysmically owing to unparalleled upheavals, politically, philosophically and socially! The **Budhha** taught that sorrow was the only abiding Truth in an otherwise alround flux of life, tantamount to unreality. It is a lie that the total meaning of the *Gita* has come down to us unaltered in and through such periods

of profound misinterpretations of life. The Epicurean world of pleasure at the other end of life, awaiting performers of ritualistic sacrifices, as promised by **Mimamsakas** could not guarantee respectability or value to the letter and spirit of the *Vedas* when large numbers of **Brahmins** like **Asvaghosha** and **Nagarjuna** abandoned **Brahminism**, the *Vedas* and the *Gita*, God and glory in preference to Nihil, an abiding Sorrow and total negation of Individuality, duty and social order and its importance in the evolving scheme of life. The **Sankhyans** had no use for heavens or hell; they viewed upon the core of human personality as **static**, unchanging, unbenefitting from the human body made up of elements, which went on changing meaninglessly without a goal. They could not discover any logic of relations between the **Body** and the **Soul**, though both were granted a status of reality. Negatively speaking, they maintained that Release meant an escape from the body for the soul in stages of progressive **yogic** exercises. There was no use for God. What could He do? Remove inequalities? Remove sufferings? What use are His 'Compassion' and 'Equality' when we see the world otherwise, whose authorship the foolish **Vedantins** attribute to Him fondly?

A Godless world of unreality (of the **Buddhists**) and a Godless world of Reality (of the **Sankhyans**), a heathen world of epicurean pleasures after life through sacrifices (of the **Vedic Ritualists**), a loveless world of abstract non-relations (of the **Absolutists**), a rigid world of pre-determined Realities (of the **Dualists**) – actually offer little worthwhile choices to anyone who take life seriously, want to understand its seeming puzzles, know its real core of meanings, and be assured that man is no mere speck of unreality to be wiped out, in the last analysis.

Where do we go? What do we start with? That is what the *Gita* answers, explicates and guides us in its higher meanings of evolution, higher orders of joy, of illumination and peace beyond all questions, contradictions, distortions.

We are like seeds, potentials, for fuller blossoming up, sown in the soil of nature as mute matter.

1. **Mama yonir mahat Brahma,**
2. **Aham bijapradah pita,**
3. **Tasmin garbham dadhamyham.**

This enunciation is the key to the understanding of the *Gita* and solves all our initial puzzles, and their endless coils of confusions and contradictions. We are here to evolve ourselves. Our bodies are our fields for this cultivation. God is the gardener, or agriculturist. All movements are useful. All relations are purposeful. We are in a world of joy as the divine scheme provides. But our sorrows are our own made because of our misunderstandings of the nature and function of our bodies, and our selves; because, by our own non-realisation of the endless interrelations in the world around, the world in us, and the worlds beyond and behind. Duty is the key to this evolution. All duties are not the same. But they need not cross one another. They are all required for a larger realisation of the collective goal of organic evolution of man into fullest spirituality. We do not understand it immediately, in our finite understanding. Finite, we are. But Infinite we must all become. That is what we often resist in our perversions. These perversions arise out of wrong priorities, putting the horse before the cart. The body-perfection is not the ultimate goal of life. That was the materialist's blind "vision"! Nor are we mere spirits hanging in the air, like ghosts! We are endowed with bodies so that we evolve. The pure spiritual monist is the other perverse side of the pure material monist. Philosophies of despair and dismay hang between these two absurd ends. Thousands of years of groping were lost in this dark jungle of disconnected, disunited 'paradise' of perversions, between the *Veda* and the *Upanishads* on the one hand, and the *Gita* on the other. Even after the *Gita* appeared, dull-stubs of misunderstandings, that followed Buddhism and Jainism prevailed. It was the tradition of Sri Ramanuja, Tilak,

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Aurobindo and other bold sons of Indian spirituality that redeemed the lost core. My Monograph has tried to give a sketch of it to you.



PRELIMINARY

Before attempting to read the *Bhagavad Gita*, with or without traditional commentaries leading to the thought-structures of well known systems, or modern write-ups evading crucial metaphysical issues, and approaching the text from profound or profane angles of scientific research, modern yoga, business management, administrative crises, human psychology or catering to uninitiated minds of a thousand variety, we have to understand the basic nature of Hindu speculation and its aims. Our *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Gita* or *Bhrahma Sutra* are not in the language of propositional thought to which one is accustomed in the West. They are essentially in the poetic mould and have a creative, synthetic, integrative, intuitive approach to life and its realities. We have to assemble and organise these utterances into categories or groups of thought-bunches, and subject them to mutual coordination, reconciliation and organisation with experience felt and recorded elsewhere in our *Puranas*, *Itihasas*, *the Smrities*, in addition to direct experience called '**pratyaksha**' which none can dare or afford to violate. Written texts, Inference and Direct Apprehension have thus come to be accepted as evidences to arrive at a system of thought which these texts suggest implicitly. (Naturally this leads to difference in schools of thought. Even so, that system of thought that is relevant and near to our actual daily life and its complexity of experience has a chance to claim our attention and deserves study better than those that hold on to pre-conceived dogmas, ready-made outlooks of thought to be fitted into the texts, or outmoded or outrageous or extravagant interpretations, that have no bearing on life and its tangled problems. Philosophy, in the East or the West, is basically

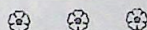
expected to be a guide to human conduct, and a systematic understanding of life of which humans are a part. To miss this basic context is to bring philosophy itself into disrepute. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan writes that a system of thought that does not address this problem is a mere 'aside', or 'arm-chair amusement'. Philosophy that does not comfort us in our stress and strain is an exercise of those who are invalids in life and is a luxury of those on whom leisure hangs as a heavy-weight. Like the Tajmahal which does not respond to the admirations of its onlookers or reciprocate their warmth of sentiments, philosophy that is non-relational has no use in the context of all relational life. And what life is there, here or beyond, beyond relations? Dr. Radhakrishnan writes this in the context of his comparing Ramanuja's approach with those of others in Indian thought. (See his: *Shankara and Ramanuja*.)

We are in an evolving world and a larger cosmos subject to cyclic order as our *Vedas* and all the *Puranas* hold. This is not without a grand purpose. The direction of that evolution and its goal was well articulated by the poet of *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Maharshi Yajnavalkya in immortal and inimitable words, once for all ;

**Aṣato ma sadgamaya,
Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya,
Mrityor ma amritam gamaya.**

"Lead me from chaos to order, let me emerge from darkness into light, and show me a way out of Mortality into Immortality." This sums up the cry of all living things, for all times. A philosopher who arrives at the 'conclusion' that life is a mirage, or a trap, and that annihilation of the self is the best solution to the problems of life, goes tangentially off this mark and misses the thrust of Vedic thought and can only mislead us. Those others that look at life as a mass of mixed and rigid

identities, unalterable in their helpless contexts also miss the essence of Vedic teachings. Handing over of such wasteful schools of thought to posterity, however cleverly or skilfully argued out in tricky logic and pompous expressions and novel explanations, hardly has any use or attractions for those who look to philosophy for light and delight. An interpreter of the *Gita* has to keep this in mind while expounding the text orally or in writing. He has, of course, the liberty to violate this, and lose his audience or readership, as indeed the case is quite often.



FOUNDATIONAL IDEAS OF THE GITA

Yajnya

The law of self-offering, self-causation, the law of life's self preservation, the law of self-continuity, and the law of Becoming leading to Beinghood or Immortality. (Put this way, it is obscure, but that is it.)

Tapas

Hard efforts to integrate faculties of bodily potencies with those of mind and speech and yoking them to achieve unity of personality through which one can visualise God, achieve Immortality and eternal service to cosmos, subjectively as well as objectively. It is complete tuning of body, mind and speech to the total evolution of the soul or the spirit to its fulness. Self-control comes as a first step in an eight-fold path called *yoga*.

Ahimsa

Non-Violence to any aspect of the law of life, and not merely avoidance of blood-shed or cruder forms of violence in terms of war, racial conquests, human suppression or insult to human dignity. Not subscribing to cosmic evolution or its goal in any form can constitute 'himsa' or violence.

Shraddha

Not merely faith in the wisdom and comfort of the cosmic forces that lead this evolution, but development of the human personality in terms of the stuff suitable for body,

mind and speech in such a way as suits the path of perfection. Man and his essential 'stuff' are identical from this angle. Body, mind and speech are 'made' and we can so feed them with food, thought and expression, appropriately in gradual steps to achieve this purpose. Conviction, courage, wisdom, right-choices, the desire for self-improvement, love, cooperation, harmony and right vision — are all products of shraddha. Trust in God's elevating Grace, and the faith that Good will triumph over Evil, also form this shraddha.

Sannyasa

Renouncement of all that is not congenial to this evolution, and not merely 'asceticism', for its own sake; or abandonment of unavoidable duties appropriate to contexts, professions, and personalities upholding society manifoldly; it is not a negation of life or unhealthy withdrawal from life which tantamounts to escapism. Positively it means depositing one's all in God, and worshipping as His Agent, refraining from selfishness or attachment to fruits of appointed duties ; not to be confused with the last 'order' or stage of social evolution, called recluse-ship, in our *Gita* context ; it is rather an attitude of life for all and throughout life.

Punarjanma

Rebirth, as a means to fulfil the missed opportunity of self-fulfillment, in earlier lives; with no achievement lost, made at any stage ; it is an assurance that life shall not fail. It is not metempsychosis or an aimless or endless transmigration of life as pessimists understand or fatalists believe; it is not eternal sorrow or its source as the early Buddhists understood but rather a positive way of life-fulfilment as the later Mahayanists were led into belief through *Gita* and Vaishnava influences.

Varna and Ashrama

The grouping of life-sustaining professions, giving them a place, a meaning and divine ordainment, as steps appropriate for the law of evolution - it is not caste as in its corrupt form or grasp : This is 'Varna' - a minimum discription of units of society and its dignified vocations such as discovery of knowledge, dissemination and preservation ; protection of social and national integrity, smooth functioning of vocations, preservation from internal or external aggressions or grabbings and confusions; the vocation of circulation of essential commodities, their production, preservation and distribution ; and the varieties of labour involved in all this inter-related smooth running of society. 'Ashrama' is the concept of human evolution from bachelorship devoted to earning of knowledge or proficiency in vocation, health-acquirement, through householdership, asceticism and final renunciation in gradually evolving steps.

Equality

The idea that everyone is great and important in his/her own place in the process of individual or social evolution, must not be confused with the latter day idea of literal or unrealistically 'liberal' ideas of the French or Bolshevic Revolutions, and the confused ideas prevalent in latter day democracies or social set-ups; equality is rather the idea of human dignity appropriate to contexts and functions leading to the law of cooperation and not competition or perpetual class-struggles; from this angle we could assert that there is neither equality nor inequality in life, but only interdependence dictating cooperation and collective living. God is in all, so all is divine! What is there to compare or compete with? Differences do not mean high and low; all are entitled to mutual care and mutual understanding and equal protection by the rulers.

Freedom and Surrender

This is a question of human individuality, its scope and limitations, and not merely rights but also duties to others and life-bearing higher forces. Absolute freedom is out of scope of life and absolute determinism is against its very spirit. Self-choice, initiation, initiative, and the liberty to self-shape, self-cause are the very breath of life. Therein lies both risk and hope. Man has the freedom also to surrender or refund this invested freedom back to God and remain as his mere agent. This is not a passive act of helplessness; but rather a positive attitude to face situations as they arise, bravely as a servant of God, and in a manner of love-bounden duty. Cosmic responsibility can not be escaped or avoided ; they can be owned only in one or two ways ; individually accountably in terms of Karma, or integrally accountable as complex duty to God and His All.

Three-fold Yoga

Man can attain God by a *Yoga* in three steps of Activity, Knowledge and Devotion, while in this life, and practising his vocation in his own field of action and stage of spiritual evolution. *Yoga* is not an abnormal activity away from life, outside its legitimate scheme or sphere. It is one integral or synthetic Yoga in three steps of :-

- (a) activity (profession) supported by spiritual knowledge and inspired by Devotion to God.
- (b) knowledge of the self, sustained by life-fulfilling activity and filled with Devotion.
- (c) Devotion sustained on activity and informed of this knowledge and of the relation between the self and God.

(Prahlada, Jada Bharatha and King Janaka represent the three in the inverse order — as our texts make it clear by example.)

In this Yoga nothing is lost — duty to the world, duty to oneself, and duty to God are all properly taken care of.

Surrender

This is a direct means to attain God as an effective alternative to the three-fold yoga, as this latter (known also as Bhakti Yoga) is understood in Ramanuja's tradition, as a practice of one of the celebrated thirty two modes of God-intuition in the *Upanishads*, known as Vidyas, forms of Upasana, Dhyana, Vedana, Jnana and so on, as Ramanuja has elaborated both in *Sri Bhashyam* and *Vedantha Sangraha*. Obviously those that are neither eligible, nor initiated, have God only as their direct refuge, through a teacher or preceptor. Plenty of hints of this path are scattered in the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Gita*, *Itihasas*, *Puranas*, *Agamas*, and the *Hymns* of Alvars. So in this our circle of life, God is the only centre. The self usurping the place of that centre is the cause of all our eccentricities. To return or refund that erring self back to that centre is Surrender, if a mathematical analogy can be allowed. The *Gita* is very vocal about it in Chapter 18 - verse 66. This is the crux of Ramanuja's thought, and the basis of his assurance that God is for all, and His doors are open to all irrespective of caste, sex, cadre-differences. In scientific terms we can call it subscription to the law of harmony and goodbye to cacophony, discord, dismay, disorder and despair that is so abundant in life, otherwise.

Human Nature as Mixed

We must note that the *Gita* emphasises on the need for man to emerge into Satwic heights from Rajasic and Tamasic

depths; consequently it pictures life, as a mixture of the three qualities as inherent in nature due to Karmic effects, and the proportion of the qualities can be altered by right thinking, right conduct and right knowledge through right company, right habits, food, study, and hard penances. No man is so fallen as to be beyond redemption or recovery, nor is anyone so pure as not to require any efforts for emancipation.

Grace

God is graceful. We can have it by asking for it and living through the right way of life. It is unconditioned as well as conditioned, depending on our stages of evolution and the contexts of life. There are three factors for salvation - God, Grace, and Guru (or teacher.) The impediment is our Karma. Fortunately Karma wears out on its own, over periods of time, and when potencies weaken, that is the time for the Grace of God and Guru to act.

The Other World

The *Gita* does believe in the 'Other World' of Immortality and elaborates ways to that higher journey, and of lower worlds to which there are other journeys. (Chapter 8).

God and World Vision

We said that we live in an inter-related world of endless grandeur and infinite possibilities. God is in the world, as well as the world is in Him. Chapter 10 reveals God's excellences as high-lighted in His manifestations here; and Chapter 11 reveals all that is, in Him, as a cosmic vision. Forget this and you lose the direction of *Gita's* teachings.

The Field, The Knower and The All-Knower

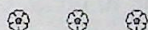
This is perhaps the very key to the proper understanding of *the Gita*. Man is like a seed sown in the soil

of his own body, his earth, his field of cultivation. The earth is God's endowment; the seed is his investment. The process of unfoldment of the potencies and possibilities of the seed through emergence from the earth, with its instrumentality and His Grace, is the real drama on life's theatre. Such an emphatic statement is nowhere else to be found in Hindu scriptures.

The Upside Down Tree

Except for a brief and rather obscure reference to this enigmatic archetype in *the Katha Upanishad* and *Taittiriya Aranyaka* we have nowhere else an elaboration of this profound, mystic symbol and its contents. The Gita refers to a Forward Path as well as a Return Path and it is important we grasp their real meanings and their complimentary natures. Otherwise we have a chance to go wide off the Gita's main teachings. The Forward Path concerns our mundane life, possessions and desires for them and numerous activities engaged towards acquirement of property, wealth, position, power, etc. In what is known as 'Karma Marga' a larger meaning is bestowed on the 'Karma Kanda' of Vedic ritualists. It takes man away from God and towards satiation of endless pleasures and itch for property-acquirement. It leads to downward cycles of sorrow, bereavement and futile acquisitions. It is not 'forward' at all, in the real sense, and is hence pictured as a peepul tree turned upside down, with uncertain roots, no further than planted in the mind of man, or *the 'Annamaya Kosha' of the Taittiriya Upanishad*. The Backward Path, so to, say lies, behind that mind-sheath, to search for which one has to cut this tree, root and branch with the weapon of dispossession and non-attachment, to go nearer the 'Anandamaya'. But man has a duty to life, to his family, society, nation and life at large. While discharging it, he should

not lose sight of this other path. Hence one has to strike a balance. The Gita does not advocate the negligence of either path, and exclusiveness is against its main teaching. Disinterested discharge of appointed duties can take care of both the worlds, and both 'paths'. Excessess can only land us in avoidable troubles. A commentary that fails to do justice to any of these fundamental ideas of *the Gita* can only fail to appeal to human reason as well as sound scholarship, and so careful and studied attempts of reconciliation and suggestions are a must.



GITA AS A SYNTHETIC WORK OF HINDU THOUGHT

Had there been no *Gita*, it would have been extremely difficult to arrive at a homogeneous system of thought based on the *Upanishads*, much more so on the extensive literature of the *Vedas* spread over the sacrificial or liturgical portions, the meditative portions and mystically basic utterances of the *Samhita* portions, what with their allegories, paradoxes, and magical incantations and invocations to a variety of gods - albeit they are psychological functionary-aspects of one Godhead! The range of variety of languages exploited for philosophical, and intuitive apprehensions by itself would be a tangle almost impossible to clear, even for Vedic, Vedantic scholars! At least half a dozen systems of thought, mutually at loggerheads with each others' grasps could be derived from the *Upanishads*, if the *Gita* was not there to guide us. Even with the *Gita*, that is the case, as attempts have been made to draw its central teachings towards pet ideas and ideals of the commentators; with this skill in auxiliary sciences, and mastery over the art of disputations or persuasions, millions have been misled over centuries about the true or original import of the *Gita*, though the entire background of the *Mahabharatha* glares in our faces with a sarcastic smile of the Epic Composer! It is therefore essential to be clear about some of these dangers and know in advance what the *Gita* is trying to synthesise and what else it rejects or avoids to bring within its gamut of reconciliation : Some examples may be useful here -

- (a) What the *Gita* rejects are exclusively ritualistic interpretation of the *Vedas*, as the *Yajnikas* attempted

in the past and their followers reverted to in later times. (Chapter 2.) It retains the thought, (in a larger improvised sense, taking us back to the spiritual meaning of the *Samhitas* and *Brahmanas*) that action (not necessarily ritualistic) in a variety of forms of life-sustaining professions, aimed at bringing spirituality even to routine activity. Even biological or physical, organic activity like breathing, breath-control, raising of temples, cooking, eating, pilgrimage, penance, study and so on, can be 'Yajnas'. It equates the Vedic concept of 'sacrifice' with what it calls 'Karma Yoga', as action harnessed in the service of knowledge-production. It asserts that in life there is a cyclic correlation between Gods and men preserving the sanctity of works as duty, divine, elevated and sublimated to service. This emphasis, this synthesis is a novelty in elaboration, of the ancient text : "The wise, the learned Brahmins desire to attain this God through Vedic recitations, by performing sacrifices, by offering charities and by recourse to fasting".* Sacrifices are not held here as independent means of attaining perishable worlds of pleasure, as un-Godly, self-propelled means of earning the other worlds, but as a direct means to God, as divine activity. It is this excess of the ritualist's over-enthusiastic extravagance that the Gita rejects, and brings back the meaning to its rightful place in Vedanta. The Sutrakara puts his seal on it - by comparing these means to horses that a rider would use to reach his desired destination. The *Sutra* would read : "Brahma Vidya or God

* "Tametam Vedanuvachanena Brahmana vividishanti
yajnena, danena, tapasa, anakshakena (Br. Up. 6-4, 22)
"sarvapeksha cha yajnadisruteh ashvavat (Br. Sutra 3-4-26)

Intuition depends on and is assisted by activities like performing Vedic sacrifices, like horses.” This is in conformity with the ancient view (confirmed by the venerable Bodhayana of the celebrated *Vritti*’s fame) that all Veda is one integral text, and the Purva and Uttara Mimamsa constitute one science in two parts comprising sixteen chapters in all, twelve covering the Karma Kanda and four, the Jnana Kanda. There is no question of setting Karma against Jnana, or vice-versa. The error of the ritualists and of extreme Vedantists is thus set right in a magnificent synthesis, avoiding excesses and exclusions. (Note that this is precisely what Ramanuja is at pains to re-establish elaborately in the **Jijnasadhikarana** of *Sri Bhashya*)

- (b) Take Vedic Sankhya (elaborated in some detail in *Chandogya*, *Svetasvatara*, *Mundaka*, *Maha Narayana* and so on) that spelt out differences between inert Matter and the Soul as different categories and accounted for this Matter in some twenty four factors. Creational accounts employ concepts like **Trivritkarana** and **Panchi Karana** [that God, in the first instance, created **Tejas, Ap, Anna** as three Basic Deities (Fire, Water and food) * as providing for the bodily habitation of the soul ; and in that evolution of Matter containing the five elements, Earth, Fire, Air, Water and Space, each contained the others in proportions of 1 : 5 - like in water, 4/5 is water, and the remaining 1/5 ' is shared by the other four and so on.] Note that Matter evolves at the urge of God for Self-Creation, and not as a separate activity away from Him, and as rooted in the mere mad flux of Matter as

❧ *Chandogya* : 6-2; *Br. Sutra* . 2-3,14: See 4-5 and so on

the originator of creation, as the latter Sankhyans held. The Sutrakara criticises* these latter **Nirishvara Sankhyavadins** time and again. There are far too many instances to quote, as they require separate elaboration. The entire **Sadvidya** is against the Godless Sankhyas!— *Srimad Bhagavatam* enunciates the teachings of the original **Kapila** (an Avatar of God) as a grand Yoga leading to Bhakti on the basis of the discriminatory knowledge between Matter and Soul on the one hand, and God and these two on the other. The latter-day spurious ‘Kapila’, rejected God and caused all confusion, carrying the Vedic meanings towards a structure of atheism that accepted the reality of the world of experience but rejected God. The latter day Patanjala Yoga-vadins gained nothing by a super-added but helpless God over this essentially atheistic base as a mere witness. The Sutrakara rejects this clumsy, unintegrated yoga with a separate manifesto of a distinct thought system, parallel to Vedanta as untenable. @

How does *the Gita* reconcile? It uses the terminology of both Sankhya and Yoga, like **avyakta**, **mahat**, **nirvana**, **ahankara**, but rejects their limited meanings at the conclusion-level. Take this equation for example :

**Ekam Sankhyam Cha Yogam Cha
Yah Pashyati Sa Pashyati ||[‡]**

“Sankhya and Yoga are essentially one as discipline and in goal ; The discerning only can understand this.”

* *Br. Sutra*: 1.1.2; 1.1.3; 1.1.5; 1.4.1; 1.4.16; 1.4.23; 2.1.1 and so on.

† *Chandogya*: 6.8 onwards. see 6.2.1 also.

@ *Br. Sutra* : 2.1.3

‡ *Gita*: 5.5

Modern Sankhya and Yoga are in fact two systems, and do not agree with this equation of the *Gita*! The *Gita* ridicules their 'ancestors' as 'childish'.*

Secondly, in terms of aims and results, achievements and expectations also the *Gita* idea radically varies from those of Sankhya. Whereas the Sankhyan would say that release from the body for the soul is itself 'liberation' - a rather negative concept - the *Gita* would say that the body is the temple of God, and emergence of the soul out of it is after a process of evolution, to whatever extent it has happened as an opportunity offered by God, and good achievements shall never be lost, and all is accumulated on the way to perfection, until it happens at the choice of the soul. The Godless Sankhya can never vouch this assurance, nor afford this positive, joyful outlook. To the *Gitacharya* life is an opportunity for perfection and not a curse or risk of fall from an unwarranted assumption of initial perfection! The attitudes are totally opposed.

Thirdly, Eternal isolation from matter or body which is 'Kaivalya' as 'Moksha' or release for the Sankhya is replaced by the attainment of God and an actual other world as a better alternative of joy in perfection in keeping with the tradition of Veda and Vedanta by *Gita*. There is actually a journey to a destination here, beyond the bounds of space and time — and no denial of the other world. The 'gunas' —

* Sankhya yogau prithak balah pravadtanti, na panditah (5-4)

Na hi kalyanakrit kaschit durgatim tata gaccha (6-40) and
Na me bhaktah pranashyati

"a man with auspicious achievements will never fall into a lower world."

"I shall not allow any devotee such a fall."

qualities of matter are accepted, concept of matter itself accepted, gets divinised and the soul too.

“The world of matter is my great originating field”*

“I am the sower of the soul as seed in it”**

Fourthly, coming to Yoga, we see these differences between the Patanjala system and the earlier adhyatma yoga of which Gita is an improved version :

Instead of the eight minimal steps (Yama, Niyama and so on) the Gitacharya promotes every act in life to a step of Yoga, thus giving us a maximal vision, and a really liberal as well as natural, elevated interpretation of all life as yoga. It is no longer a detached or special activity. You can practise it everywhere, always :

While seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, moving, dreaming, breathing, shouting, receiving, rejecting, waking, sleeping *

It is a must that you ‘must’ control the senses and try to see yourself away as a doer, not the deed, the soul and not the body or its instruments or factual potential faculties. Thus you gain self-control and this takes care of most of the lower steps of Patanjala Yoga. The rigours of food control, fasting, seclusion, abstemism, vows of a variety, are all replaced by easier steps that suit the individual, and vary according to situations and persons, and can be practiced without disturbing the routine, orderly life or its vocations.

* mama yonir mahad brahma, tasmin garbham dadhamyham (14-3)

** aham bijapradah pita (14-4)

☆ Ch. 5-8, 9.

Actually the whole of the *Gita* is a comprehensive 'Yoga Sastra' for this reason, and all its eighteen chapters correspond to a Yoga. Grief can be Yoga too, if it is grieving over lack of right knowledge, missing the appropriate convictions for proper appointed duties of life. There is not a moment of life when you can afford not to be a Yogi! It is wrong to think that the *Gita* advocates only three Yogas of action, knowledge and devotion - there are a good deal of steps in between, each of them entitled to be so called.

Fifthly, Yoga in *Gita*'s view is not the annihilation of the mind or its arrest, or dissociation from God and higher states of bliss, but rather a promotion of all faculties of the personality to a Godly state and a perfection of unison with Him.*

Here is Yoga easy to practice and achieve, test for yourself about its achievements on the way, if only you have determination, discrimination and the desire to reach your goal of Perfection. You require a 'guru' no doubt, but who can be better than God Himself who is ready to serve you in your chosen role? Here is *Yoga* of fulfilment and not of the Nihil as Sankhya led to in the hands of the godless Buddhists and others later on. This is particularly important to remember in these days when all sorts of things are being 'sold' here and abroad in the name of Yoga.

- (c) Let us come to the idea of renunciation or Sannyasa and see how the *Gita* improves on the **ashramic**, ideal as the fourth state of evolution on the way to

♦ Ch 6-21 to 23 **tam vidyat duhkha samyogaviyogam yoga samjnitam**
 "It is at once the dissosiation of sorrow from the mind and an attainment of the highest state of bliss ! Nothing higher than it ! **Sukham atyantikam**".

perfection. The **smṛiti** texts following the Vedas have prescribed four stages for the evolution of man - brahmacharya, (celibacy, pupilship, schooling under a preceptor), householdership, (Marriage, management of family and feeding of guests etc.), reclusership (Vanaprastha or proceeding to the forests, as a first step of detachment from relation, property, work, as a means to livelihood, and from a hundred varieties of sorrow arising from attachment) and finally total renunciation (abdication from life, and devotion of all energy and time to God and the moment of union with Him.)

But this is only for a Brahmin! The warrior, The merchant or farmer or the labourer and even women folk of all walks of life are exempted from these ideals in their totality. Some are allowed the first two or three only; others not even that much. The idea is that life must run as a wheel, and all professions cannot come to a dead stop all of a sudden. Secondly there are other lives (**janmas**) to take care of those untrodden steps or stages of life. Perfection is not the achievement of one life; you cannot have it for the asking! But even so, great princes like Yudhisthira had undue predilections towards unwarranted renunciation, as fatigued minds often seek rest at dangerous moments of life from our collective living. How could there be abdication from duty in what you call 'essential services'? A policeman, a warrior, a doctor, a social volunteer, a coffin-bearer or priest cannot take rest away from appointed duties! This is a problem often discussed at length in crucial contexts of the Epic. So *the Gita* offers a larger, more natural, liberal and easy-to-follow concept of **Sannyasa** for all to

practice, without disrupting the social order. This is a new synthesis, The concept is **retained** but the context **altered**, enlarged in its scope and meaning to cover all life. *The Gita* is totally silent on the ideal of 'sannyasa' as prescribed by the **smriti** texts; it is no rejection, but absorption to a greater concept. See this altered meaning :

“giving up of selfish activity, or attributing their motive force to and owning God as the Impeller - is **Sannyasa**.”*

'**Sannyasa**' literally means “keeping all yours in someone as a caretaker.” “Depositing your all in someone whose confidence you have as your caretaker.” It means in effect “self-surrender”, unburdening of yourself in terms of doership, ownership, enjoyer of fruits of your actions, and reducing yourself voluntarily to his agency. It means dispossession of all your responsibilities and cares. The *Gita* itself calls this “Sarva sankalpa Sannyasa.”[^] It is not renunciation of 'action' as such, but only a mental attitude of detachment from ego.* The *Gita* gives this same meaning to '**Naishkarmya**' also. There is both improvement and reconciliation.

- (d) Take the law of professional harmony or coordination called **Varna** to see how elevated a meaning and place it gives to this fallen concept, even in the days of the Epic. We see its degenerate form as corrupted 'caste'. But what was the ancient law? It was division of socially needed duties as per the propensities and

⌘ Kamyam Karmanam nyasam, sannyasam Kavayo viduh (18-2).

^ Ch. 6-4

* See also 18-57, 12-6, 3-30, 5-13, 12-6, 9-28 and so on.

potentialities of man so that heart-burns, unwanted rivalries and excessive concentration on some rather than others depending on their money-earning power, social status and privileges or advantages, could be avoided. The goal was mutual-respect and harmony, equal distribution of wealth, social responsibilities and liabilities. Until and unless the framework of society was stable and its structure reasonable and well worked out, no orderly progress could be made by anyone in terms of the well recognised four Ends called **Artha** (wealth), **Kama** (desire), **Dharma** (order) and merit accrued due to rightful conduct and **Moksha** (liberation.) Even in the Epic we have instances of eminent personages like Yudhishtira having tendencies to question this orderly progress, and debates abound there.▪ There was a tendency towards excessive quietism, pacifism and asceticism.° Neglect of one's duties in one's essential profession would lead to mass neglect of all duties of all professions, and further to a free-for-all situation resulting in the law of the jungle! The *Gita* upholds and brings out a rationale for order in this context to uphold the Ancient Law mistaken for 'caste' as man-made out of greed and with the motive of exploitation and to keep some under regimentation and subjugation, as is alleged even today! The *Gita* emphatically states that the original law is God ordained, * on the basis of the qualities in the man appropriate for him, and distributed work-wise. Each way of grouping (**Varna**) would thus

■ The Famous episodes of Bhima - Nahusha discussions, or the Yaksha episode at the end the *Vana Parvam*.

○ See Udyoga 72-42, 70 in the Gorakhpur Edition of the *Gita Press*.
Also the Dharma vyadha episode at the end of *Vana Parvan*

* 4-13

comprise several professions that now fall under different 'castes'!

Take for example 'the commercial or merchant' grouping - (**Vaishya**)

1. Agriculture,
2. Dairy-farming,
3. Trade,
4. Transport,
5. Cattle-rearing
6. Seed-preservation,

just to name a few,^a fall under this **varna**. Farmers, Transportmen, tool makers, all manner of traders, shepherds, cowherds, potters, oil-extractors, bee-keepers, butchers and meat-sellers, (and numerous others in our days of complexities), smiths, cart-makers, and so on come under this grouping. To identify the 'Vaishya' exclusively with any one of these professions under the mistaken notion of caste, would be the height of foolishness! It is to clear this folly that the *Gita* elaborates on this. ♦

The much abused or accused **Brahmin Varna** would comprise of duties associated with equanimity of mind, self control, penance, purity, straight forwardness, forgiveness, perseverance, thirst for knowledge, specialisation in all knowledge that elevates, including spiritual knowledge, faith in God and Divine forces and so on. This would include today:

1. Lawyers and jurists,
2. Law Makers, legists,

^a 18-44

♦ 18-41 to - 48

3. Legistators,
4. Researchers and codifiers,
5. Sociologists,
6. Astronomers,
7. Priests,
8. Preceptors,
9. Musicologists,
10. Theorists of art, archetecture, warfare, public-administration,
11. Preservers of all manners of discovered knowledge, starting from lexicon-makers, grammarians, historians and ending up with commentators on systems, philosophy, sciences of health, music, Archery and all other lores.

This list can be made quite longer.

Similarly among those grouped into **Kshatriya Varna** are those possessed of heroic qualities; brilliance and splendour for excellencies in adventurous adroits, candour, forbearance, ability to carry forward in bringing order, administration, capacity to rule, firmness in duty- spots of protection and so on. We can include in this such professionals as :

1. Administrators,
2. All kinds of army-men,
3. Rulers, (Parliamentarians of today), legislators,
4. Pilots, naval-men, strategists in warfare,
5. Military advisors,
6. Governors.
7. Tax collectors and so on.

All sundry types of auxiliary service, can be included in the **Shudra Varna** :

1. Mechanics in road-side garages,
2. Landless labourers,
3. Errandmen like postal employees, railwaymen,
4. Servants in Govt. offices, in the service of merchants, milk vendors, flower sellers, gas suppliers,
5. Newspaper boys, courier deliverers,
6. Men working in printing presses, call-boys in hospitals, I.T. centres, duty guards, sentries and so on.

You would be convinced that these are not 'caste' based, but profession-based groupings. This is all that the *Gita* upholds, to retrieve the basis for a harmonious co-existence. Or else there would be strikes everyday (even as it is today) and life paralysed for some reason or the other, professional rivalries, encouraged leading to daily tensions and strife in which no profession can be practised or pursued so as to make lasting and required contributions to the society large. It leaves it to the individuals and their conscience to choose professions as dictated by the law of their being and not by arbitrary circumstances or vanities. You may say that there is nothing new in all this as different from ancient *smriti* texts ; but this bold rediscovery and unambiguous restatement was needed by the times in terms of rationale for reconciliation, reconstruction and readjustment.

- (e) The concept of **Avatar**, of Divine Descent, of God participating in human history to give it a healthy direction in confusing times, is again a bold re-

statement after their mention in the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*. The *Smritis* are more concerned with the ordering of human behaviour, and therefore we do not expect them to expand on things looked at from God's end. The *Gita* too is a *smriti* text, but with a difference, in as much as it explains life from both ends, the human and godly. This is a magnificent effort as it removes confusions caused by Sankhyans, Ritualists, atheists, and Absolutists, Isolationists both **Vedic** and **Unvedic** or **anti-Vedic**. Chapter 4 (verses 5 to 11) devotes a good deal of space for this. Chapter 10 expounds 'God in the world', and Chapter 11 reveals 'The world in God' in all His Splendour, glory, and Cosmic Mantle, to make **Avatar** a foundational concept of *the Gita*, and indeed of all Hindu thought. The *Mahabharatha* in its background supports it entirely, at various contexts. **Avatar** brings divinity to life and purpose, direction and dimension, to avoid views of accidentality, casualness, fatality, despair and waywardness - the banes of dismal philosophies of atheism, epicureanism, determinism of Nature and cynicism. (The latter day Buddhism and Jainism are anticipated and answered once for all effectively and decisively hereby.)

We can point out many other attempts of such bold statements, reconciliations, clarifications and synthesis, throughout the *Gita*. These are merely highlights.



SRI KRISHNA AS AVATAR, MANY ASPECTS REVEALED IN ONE

This is a unique **Avatar** combining in itself several roles of:

- a) A revolutionary come down on earth to reestablish Dharma, at a crucial juncture of mankind's history.
- b) An eminent fighter in the cause of justice, law and order, and no mere 'witness' as Yoga philosophers and Absolute Vedantins would want Him to remain as!
- c) Neutral to opposing forces, and at the same time asserting the right, lawful and justified, impartially.
- d) A divine teacher in a human form, come down to restate the Ancient law unambiguously, contextually, leaving no scope for perversions or misinterpretations.
- e) A reformer come down to remove corruptions in the grasp or practice of the Ancient law, redeeming the innocent from the clutches of cruel dictators and opportunists, a reformer to the core in individual life-codes, social practices, political ideology and national goals of well-being and man-to-man relations in all fields of activity.
- f) A synthesizer of the best that has come down to us as heredity, in contemporary thinking, and of original thoughts needed to make all that comprehensive, meaningful, integral and artistically unified, so that one

can deduct the needed instructions at any time of crisis. A great system-maker that leaves nothing outside his scheme, as long as it is useful, makes sense and contributes to individual and collective welfare, be it orthodox or heretical of origin in thought or expression.

- g) A great moderniser of ancient wisdom in nontechnical language, employing poetry as his vehicle of thought.
- h) A visionary who can draw up a plan for the future of mankind, in terms political ideology, in appropriate social framework, and fit human psychology into it smoothly and artistically - one who does not forget the past or the present in preference to an unborn future, as is the tragic case with our latter day numerous visionaries.
- i) A romantic builder, who weeds out 'stubs' in the garden of time, mercilessly, but artistically at the same time, like a surgeon in a hospital theatre, restoring health to the patient, like a gardener who does not sacrifice his aesthetic sense in misplaced compassion for outgrowths that have served their time, and are now no more than of nuisance value for the garden of his vision.

Romance, adventure, aesthetic grandeur pervade the whole of *Gita*, revealing the personality behind in all this unique blend. The creative scheme of life enunciated and elaborated here have no parallel in the entire Hindu thought, in their crispness, inter-connectedness of statements, thoughts and conceptual loftiness, clarity and majesty of utterance.



THE MAIN THRUST OF GITA'S THOUGHT-FLOW

What we should never lose sight of, while reading *the Gita* or attempting to follow its main teachings, can now be summed up briefly as a warning to avoid excesses, omissions, perversions and subjective readings.

1. Arjuna's initial situation, his misgivings and yearning for a proper conviction driving him on to his duty, his prayer for a right motive force, failing which he is in danger of relapsing into escapism, harmful ascetism, inaction, pacifism and excessive quietism - must never be lost sight of. It is this that the *Gita* is obliged to address, answer and retrieve the victim from the diseases named here. So the *Gita* comes as a bold text advocating **duty** above all other considerations. It is a Manual for Right Action and not exemption or escape from duty. people who try to hang on to *Gita*, ghosts of illusionism and escapism as thoughts superimposed, have therefore done immense damage to its main teachings. It is to set right this trend the great Lok Manya Bal Gangadhar Tilak wrote his immortal '*Gita Rahasya*' in Marathi which was subsequently translated into English also. 'Karma Yoga' therefore is the main plank on which the complex meaning - structure of *the Gita* stands. We have to accommodate all other teachings of this complex texts in that main context only.
2. The Lok Manya may have erred on the 'right side', however, while dismissing the 'Jnana' and 'Bhakti' components as 'escapes' away from Action, in his

national context of a call to fight against the British to throw them away, and may have therefore underrated commentaries oriented to this latter teaching. But we need not go so far even in that context; as **Action** bereft of spiritual knowledge, and uninspired by Divine love might lead to mere quixotic misadventure. That is not the ethos of this ancient land or its culture. The *Gita's* elaboration need not be of **one** only of the three - Action, Knowledge, Devotion. They have to be all the three rolled into one, with **Action** as the main thrust, as **Yoga** that can release from bondage and **Yoga** that can fulfil and bring perfection. Even 'surrender' is meant to make the **Yogi** shed the last taints of selfishness and ready him for love-filled and knowledge-informed action. Lose this direction and you are nowhere on the way to understand the *Gita*.

3. Detailed analysis of the human personality, of the elements, mind, intellect, and all faculties, the body as Field with its triple **gunas**, leading to a study of modes of **sraddha** and so on, are all to reinforce this main teaching to clear all possible doubts in the contexts of confusing thoughts arising from the Sankhyan way or the Ritualist's way.
4. **Vishvarupa**, cosmic vision of the Lord, is again to show man's proper place in the Divine Scheme of things, enabling him to see what is his duty, what is his goal and the ultimate destiny of mankind or the universe. It is not a static or frightening interlude, entertaining, lulling and dismaying. Nor is it a vision calling on one to lose himself in that vision to miss his sense of duty or obligation to the universe embodying God.

5. In short, anyone violating or ignoring the integrality of the *Gita*'s main teaching will be doing a great harm not merely to the *Gita*, but also Hindu thought and humanity at large which needs that teaching today in its entirety unvandalised.



THE ROLE OF A RIGHT COMMENTATOR

If the *Gita* is so exquisite, compact and so well articulate in its teaching, where is the need for a commentator? - one may ask.

The answer, again, is complex, requiring some detailed analysis.

1. The *Gita* has a structural pattern leading the novice from point to point of heights, aspect-wise, implication-wise, as a winding stair-case, or steps leading to a hill-top shrine. The Chapters are well connected like the '**adhikaranas**' (Sub-heads) of the *Brahma Sutra*. To my best knowledge, except Sri Ramanuja none has paid attention to this cumulative meaning, and inter-connected the achieved meanings, chapter wise. There is a thing called contextual, critical analysis, contextual commentary to prevent you from your tendency to pick what you like and isolate it, run away with it, and brandish it as your discovery or your contribution, your orientation based on your prejudices, your pet theories and attempts to fit ancient thinking into this narrow nest.
2. In the past such distortions **have** taken place; a **vritti** is supposed to be an 'expansion' of ideas of the original text, introducing the **vrittikara's** own ideas. This may be right if the direction of the text and the **vritti** are the same, as it would only mean updating Bodhayana, who wrote such a **vritti** on the

Purvamimamsa and *Uttara mimamsa* texts taken as one body of canon in two parts, did a fine job; this does not amount to distortion, but only expansion. It is not wrong to develop an ancient idea or elaborate it to modern audiences. Similarly the famous **vritti** of **Brahmanandi Tanka** on the not-now-available *Dramida Bhashya* (on either the entire *Brahma Sutras*, or the *Chandogya Upanishad* containing a majority of those 32 vidyas thought in it), from which Sri Ramanuja quotes to vindicate the direction of his **Bhashya**, is also justified as a faithful elaboration.

The '**Vritti**'s of the Bauddha tradition are another matter! A **vritti** that 'improves' upon a text by taking what it thinks is relevant for it, and rejecting or passing over inconvenient or troublesome obstacles on its path, or adding injurious matter foreign to the original teaching is a danger! The famous *Mandukya Karika* of Gaudapada on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, and Sureswara's **Vritti** on Shankara's *Brihadaranyaka Bhashya* widely diverge from the original on vital points. This is where different 'schools' arise, to mislead future generations! You can bring in all modern knowledge into your contexts of explication, elaboration, justification, simplification but on one condition, namely that you are faithful to the main import and do not violate its central context.

3. A good commentator would try to make clear what may be obscure in the original, apparently self-contradictory, and what needs additional support textually, traditionally, in the larger background of the culture which that text expounds: eg. in the *Gita*, citing of additional appropriate verses from the *Mahabharatha*,

Harivamsha, Sri Bhagavata, Vishnu Purana, Vedic-Upanishadic texts, *Brahma Sutras*, quotes from other Puranas, Agama texts are all welcome. Only a scholarly commentator can afford to do this.

4. Since the *Gita* is a Yogic text, the commentator would also be expected to be a yogi, to whom its excellences are available only at Yogic heights.

Warning :

Vedanta is often dubbed as 'philosophy of religion' by the Westerners to equate it with 'theology' as distinct from philosophy pure, since the time of Locke, Hobbes, Des' Carte, Kant, Spinoza and Leibniz. There is no such demarcation in Indian thought. Europeans called all sciences of today as Natural Sciences, and all thought as Natural History to include what we call Social Sciences, Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences. These distinctions are artificial, serve no purpose and have vanished, obviously. In India all thought is meant to be at the service of man - whether Ayurveda, Musicology, Poetry, speculative thought, Psychology, Astronomy or whatever else. There is no such thing as pure or impure theology here. (That is reserved for Christianity and Islam as closed religions, based on unverifiable dogmas.) Secondly, thought-systems evolved around concrete styles of life, thus investing divinity, custom and traditional value to what have come to be known as closed schools of thought, with no interaction, cross-fertilisation over the centuries in all the humiliating periods of our foreign conquests. That is unfortunate; but 'schools' are taken seriously and not meant for idle arm-chair amusement to be discarded at will or ignored in daily

life. The *Gita* is **Yoga Sastra** and therefore a guide-book for the individual's ascent to God, in his own daily life, a code of social conduct, a manual for political unification, public administration, crisis management, material management — all in one as is being slowly but surely being realised today. There is metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, psychology, physiology, diet-science, ecology, even history, sociology and whatever else is needed to understand man and the cosmos in and around him. This no longer looks like a tall claim, looking at the amazing range of books and studies emerging on our text in the last ten or twelve years alone!

5. Negative interpretations of life can hardly be entertained in the context of the *Gita* - not only Sankhya, but also any others Eastern or Western. Matter or the world around is no contamination on God. Man is not a product of blind determinism on the part of mindless nature. It is the very instrument of man's evolution, an aid provided by providence — **Daivi Maya**.^{*} It is man who makes it **mohini**, **asuri**,^{*} against his own self-interests, wilfully, by a misuse of God-invested faculties. This direction is express throughout the *Gita*. A commentator who goes against this will only mislead us.
6. Organicism of life - matter, life and God - put together is non-violable.^γ The cosmic vision is an expansion of the ideas of **Purusha Sukta**, further annotating it. No commentator can be blind to it as meant for the unfit, dull-witted, or the nondaring among God's devotees.
7. The "*Sthita Prajna*" description[■] cannot be taken as a static, mind-anulled, or mind-annihilated State of subject-objectless "Experience" (whatever it means!). This runs against the

⊗ *Gita* 7-14. * *Gita* 9-12

γ Ch-7 Para & *Apara prakriti*, and their relation to God.

■ 2-54 onwards

main context of the *Gita*. It is a supremely concentrated moment of contemplation before action, untrammelled by extraneous sensuous or other irrelevant considerations; it is like a moment when rivers fulfil an ocean without swelling it, as the analogy here only, makes it clear.* God-love and self-knowledge cannot be treated as disturbing, extraneous factors here, as the text is express here.* It is called **Brahmi Sthiti**, a God filled state of mind.* To equate it with something like the Buddhistic Nihil or equate it with **Jnana Yoga**, or **Kaivalya** would be an unforgiveable distortion! A commentator has to reconcile to the main Vaishnava character of the text, and an epitome of the Bhagavatic philosophy as embodied in Agamas and Puranas and the Epics.

8. Leave aside ancient commentators who had limitations of their times and contexts, as we do have our own today. Let us take the best they could offer and bring the message upto date. What is a modern commentator expected to do? Gandhiji wrote one to mean that the *Gita* advocates 'Anasakti' 'non-interestedness' (whatever it may mean) from his extreme point of view of Non-Violence at any cost. It is obviously an over interpretation. Sripad Dange wrote one to infer that the *Gita* teaches communism! Vivekananda and Chinmaya too wrote to emphasise Jnana Yoga. Sri Aurobindo develops Ramanuja's positive and integral approach to the *Gita*, splendidly. Only if you study the two commentaries side by side you will see correspondences. The conclusions are for you to make.



ALTERNATIVES THAT THE *GITA*-VIEW OF LIFE
CAN AND HAS TO FACE

Over the ages in the past, savants and founders of particular favourite systems have tried to draw the Gita view to their directions and many have failed. In India today most scholars dare not take up these issues for fear of controversies that serve no purpose. W. P. Hill wrote an excellent book about a century ago comparing the views of the Acharyas. (Oxford University Press.) Maxmuller and other orientalisists have tried it too. Volumes have been written to approximate the Gita view towards Absolutism which maintains that Brahman is above relations, the world a mere passing appearance, and that man is Brahman under an inexplicable illusion that neither 'is' nor 'is not' in the highest sense of reality. Obviously this is far too away from the Gita view, but a large number of present day exponents stick to this view for whatever purpose, mental solace, intellectual satisfaction it may afford. Below this rigorous Absolutism hangs loose, a world view, not really as a corollary but as a concession to those still unprepared for the 'higher view', that hardly admits of relations, salvation and bondage, efforts for attainment of perfection, admitting all that popular Hinduism believes in and treasures up. A majority of *Gita* verses and contexts and its repeated messages are sought to be fitted into this lower import, while reserving what else lends to support the higher view for that special message. Nothing of consequence or value is totally rejected here, but only fitted into high, higher, lower, and lowest, levels of meaning, without

a binding integration or coherence of one complex meaning. It is like a shop where all things are offered and you select or buy what you require. This eclectic approach has pleased many over centuries as it avoids rigours of selection or disputations that finally decide nothing, and appeals to all at some 'level' or the other. If you try to disturb this 'balance' (as you may call it in a way) and try to fix up the real, final import of the *Gita*, you are likely to be dubbed as 'sectarian' 'narrow' and 'school-oriented' and what not! That is how other approaches have not been encouraged to float to the front for whatever claims to truth they may or may not have. This monopoly is unhealthy and is behind a good deal of misunderstanding that all Hindu thought is pessimistic as the early German translators Schopenhauer and Paul Deussen felt and wrote. Swamy Vivekananda, Swamy Chinmayananda and numerous other Hindu missionaries to date are still spreading and selling this view abroad as the most authentic interpretation of all *Vedanta*, including the *Gita* text. It is up to you to examine or verify. Philosophy proceeds by rational tests of inquiry - faithfulness to the text, sticking to logical norms, and verifying with actual daily experience in life – **Shabda**, **Anumana**, and **Pratyaksha**. Honesty, earnestness are more important than belonging to this or that tradition, as traditions come and go, but you have only this life to verify the truth and find your way to Perfection or Salvation. School-affiliations which originally arose to bind philosophical convictions to actual ways of life, to make them purposeful, ultimately have led to a blind sticking to unchanging, uncompromising positions, leading no one, anywhere, in frozen and outmoded thoughts serving no contextual reference. Let nobody mistake this frank piece of writing for a new dogma. Philosophical disputations which date back to the days of Rishis and Rajarshis like **Yajnavalkya** and **Janaka** have now become mockish

rehearsals where nothing of value emerges while parties stick to pet positions and the arguments never proceed on lines of enlightenment but to vanquish each others as almost enemies rather than opponents of rival schools ready to give and take. Vestiges hang on while real life has-been robbed off. This must end, if Indian thought is to make any new headway, and even modern scientific thought and new facts of life as data have to be accepted for examination, shedding unhealthy exclusiveness and the 'holier than thou' attitude which are the hall-marks of closed dogmatic religions like Islam and Christianity. Vedanta is a science which proceeds by examining evidences and admitting comprehensiveness, by testing alternatives for their tenability or untenability. In our present day when even Westerners are examining the *Gita* from points of view of Quantum Physics, Genetic Sciences, health, administration, management, governance, psychology, ecology and a variety of practical useful points of view, it would be tragic and suicidal if we still stick to out-moded forms of Absolutism, Determinism, exclusionism, illusionism, cynicism of a variety and so on.

Take Determinism or Fatalism. This is again a medieval view that things do not change and that there is no evolution either in matter or souls. It is difficult to fit this into either Sankhya or Yoga. The world is claimed to be real by sheer declamation and unsupported evidences in actuality, but in so far as nothing matters to anybody and since mutual relationship is ruled out, God holds the helpless world as His colony and does nothing to save the Eternally Dammed to Hell, or those condemned to endless migration in cycles, as it is the nature of things that has so ordered them! We may call it '**Svabhava Vada**', and this way of answering things silences the metaphysical hankering to unravel the mystery of life or creation, as to why things are what they are. The whole exercise

emphasised by the *Gita* is one in which man is designed to emerge out of natural forces towards Godhead from **mohini prakriti** into **daivi**, and of attainment of God as Bliss. This is the direction of all Vedantic thought also. To deny this is to misinterpret the message of the Vedas. If some men are so designed in advance, as to be assured of salvation in advance, efforts on their parts towards this end would be really needless! **Sadhana** being thus made a mockey would rob the meaning of III Chapter of *Brahma Sutra* and make it a waste or a meaningless tractate. Obviously The *Gita* does not subscribe to this negative view.

Some attempts have been made to interpret the *Gita* as an expression of mystical ecstasy minus metaphysical thought-content or a well-thought out philosophical framework. **Bhakti** is not emotion let loose, or liberated from dutiful action or divorced from insight into spiritual realities that constitute aspects or dimensions of the human personality. The matter is far too complex to be treated in a cavalier fashion. It is **Yoga**, and **Yoga** is not losing oneself in unenlightened mysteries of life, with a callous attitude of negligence to moral or spiritual questionings that are unavoidable in a man on the way to the spiritual goal.

Therefore the commentator has the need to keep clear of all excesses, pitfalls and short-comings arising out of a fatigued mind attached to and confirmed in fixtures that have no sense or bearing on the text of the *Gita*.



SRI RAMANUJA, HIS TRADITION BEHIND, AND ESTIMATES OF HIS COMMENTARY AS USEFUL EVEN TODAY

It is remarkable that the problems faced by Sri Krishna as a synthesiser of stray strands of valuable thought of his times, are precisely those faced by Sri Ramanuja in his own similar times, as decisively shown and analysed by prof. J. A. B. Van Buitenin in his excellent monograph on Sri Ramanuja's Commentary on *Gita*. Die-hard systems never die in history, and make attempts to surface to the top when right vision flickers in dark periods or spiritual history of mankind! There were added dimensions of confusion too :

There was no Buddhism or Jainism in the days of Sri Krishna or Gita. The Brahma Sutras do deal with these at 2.2-10, 2.2.17, 2.2.27, 2.2.30, 2.2.31 and so on. Both Shankara and Ramanuja deal with these in their own several ways.

It is remarkable that neither Buddhism nor Jainism find worthwhile direct references in the *Mahabharata* or the *Gita*, though we may surmise their earliest versions that resembled these atheistic needs must have existed earlier.

How the Brahma Sutras, contemporaneous with the *Gita* could imply their teaching as **prima-facie** views is a mystery, though, herein also they are not directly mentioned but summed up for analysis and disposal, as identified by the commentators. The atheistic **Sankhyans**, the ambiguous **Yoga Vadins**, and the 'half-atheists' of the **Vaishesika** school, and **Purva Mimamsa**, had caused a good deal of confusion and damage to the integrity of Vedic-Vedantic thought in the days

of *Mahabharatha*. The *Gita* took care of them in its day and restored sense, unity and continuity.

In Ramanuja's times, this was added to by the Buddhists who denied reality to **Atman**, dismissed God as creator, attributed entire fluency and impermanance to life, denying identity as a possibility, and abiding and abounding sorrow as the only reality of life, caught in the clutches of an authorless, inexorable **Karma**. The Jains denied God and the other world, though accepting **Atman** and the reality of life, and devising endless tortuous vows, self-denials and advocating a negative attitude to life in their over- emphasised asceticism, dispossession and an entirely joyless outlook of life. Ramanuja had to answer them, to redeem the *Gita* and reestablish it in the minds of misguided masses and intellectuals that-got distracted. Additionally, Sankhya, Yoga, Pashupatha were there, again.

A third dimension was that **Pancharathra Agama**, a great **Bhagavata** science of worship in artful form, of God in consecrated Icons and Idols, that had come to replace Vedic sacrifices since the days of Sri Krishna, and the *Mahabharatha*, had come to be disputed as of canonical authority by the dry Vedists and Absolutists who preferred "meditation on the nameless or formless, attributeless Reality" in place of God as concrete reality in what came to be known as **Saguna** worship!

The Absolutists had brought in lots of division, discord and dichotomy into Vedantic, standard texts and had perverted the very terminology of Vedantic interpretation. (**Yamuna, Nathamuni**, Ramanuja's predecessors among others had attended to it to dispel confusions, earlier ; still not so ably or decisively as Ramanuja;) Let us see what things needed reconciliation or integration :

1. The **Saguna** texts of the *Upanishads* needed reconciliation with the so called **Nirguna** texts, to dispel the wrong notions that the former was for the gullible, unimaginative,

emotive understanding that could not go beyond finiteness, and that the latter for the more daring, the more intellectual and seekers of the Infinite or the Indefinite, so that it led to the view of two Brahmanas, untenable on any Upanishadic thought.

2. The **Mahavakyas** (the so called greater or 'superior utterances' needed reconciliation with the **Laghuvakyas**, or statements with minor imports which could be ignored in system-making. (Ramanuja maintained that all Veda was one body of sacred texts admitting no such false or artificial classification, on the misused Parvamimamsa analogy of Apaccheda Nyaya.*

3. **Apara Vidya** (grasped as the, 'Non-higher Intuition' by the Absolutists) and **Para Vidya** (as pure and unadulterated Intuition) required reconciliation, as the Mundaka Upanishad, from which context this classification arises* both forms as **Vidyas** only! They are, as Ramanuja shows, a two-fold Vidya, in one, with two stages of Brahman-grasp or understanding. While the Absolutist rejects the '**Apara Vidya**' as '**Avidya**' meant for only rejection (including all the Samhita, Brahmana and other texts as of inferior import as compared to the pure Upanishadic texts teaching about the Formless Brahman), Ramanuja shows that:-

apara : is indirect perception, heard through a teacher, or learnt through a text, in one's pupilship days, and

Para : is direct apprehension of God in **Yogic** experience based on the same.

So there is the difference of Secondary experience and Primary experience corresponding to **Savikalpaka** and **Nirvikalpaka** modes in yoga. He quotes verses from the *Vishnupurana* " to resolve this tangle :

■ It literally means: "Cut off what you need as useful and keep it, while you can dispose off the un-essential". In vedic rituals, a more comprehensive rite of purity can suffice giving a holiday to the minor ones.

* *Mundaka* 1-1-4

" 6-5-61 to 65

“Knowledge or experieperience is two-fold as is held by the ancients : The first step consists of what is textual and in oral words ; The latter is of the nature of wisdom achieved by or through actual Experience Bhagavan Manu also rules in this same fashion, in the context of explicating the meaning of the **Atharva Sruti*** that while the lower step enables to know Brahman, as second hand, as mere guide, the higher step takes one to God directly. The higher experience is God, attainment, while the lower is a grasp of all Vedic texts as preparatory to it.”

So the question of ‘opposition’ is smoothly resolved, and rejection avoided !

(4) The same applies to the Absolutist’s invented contradiction between: **Savikalpaka Samadhi** and **Nirhikalpaka Samadhi** which Ramanuja reconciles both at *Vedārtha Sangraha* and *Sri Bhashyam*.

In fact Ramanuja removes the misconceived notion that:
Savikalpaka Pratyaksha = “Imagined or artificially induced trance, something of a man-make, a figment of human creation for a lower Satisfaction,”and

Nirvikalpaka Pratyaksha = “Experience with a nothing ‘before’ not ‘after’, Absolute, subject-objectless, and absolutely unmade, or without preconception.”



* referring to this same Mundaka text as it stems from the Atharva Veda and is so called, therefore.

WHAT IS THE TRUE UNDERSTANDING?

How does experience (and language in this context) originate? Ramanuja explains : Language and experience are associated in the mind firmly when the mother shows a cow to her child and says "Look, this is a cow", with the forefinger pointed at it. At that time how much of the 'cow' does the child grasp in its mind, if that is the first exposure to it? Logicians call this as '**Prathama Pinda Grahana**', experience with no earlies locus, or '**nir-vikalpa**' in the sense that without preconceived idea, no prepossessed cognition: direct exposure of the mind to an object of experience. Naturally it is a 'poor' experience, with no idea as to what characteristics to grasp, note, experience in detail, or appreciate, or preserve for later recapitulation or the pleasure of memory, with no idea whatever of future joy or past background. It is a loosely waving flicker of a mere present with no anticipation or expectation, detached from all dimensions of time or space or other associations. In fact, until a similar second or third exposure to the same object - cow - is repeated, the child has no better grasp or appreciation or 're-cognition' or joy or pleasure or other 'values' attached to worthwhile experiences, and so this first, direct experience is actually 'enriched' and not 'impoverished' by later repeated similar experience — this which is called '**Savikalpa**' experience - or '**dvitiyadi pinda grahana**'. Why should anyone hold it in contempt in the Buddhist or crypto-Buddist manner? Actually this is the direction in which experience proceeds - from 'direct' to more and more detailed 'firsts' ;

each is direct in itself but resembling earlier ones, and is more **direct**, more detailed, more meaningful, more enriched improved versions, and not cancellation, distortions or aberrations or illusions from nowhere! Why should therefore 'savikalpa' experience be held in contempt ? Because it is 'related' to earlier ones, and the Absolutist has contempt for 'relations' as against life's reality, its contents, its direction, and enriched warp and woof! This is a Buddhist legacy, this preference for a non-articulate, non-manifest, contentless 'experience' without a subject or object. Such a 'blank' is no real experience, says Ramanuja ; and nowhere do *the Vedas*, *Upanishads*, or *the Gita* speak of it. The Sutrakara is expressly contemptuous of this 'Vacuous Reality' of the Buddhists, which is no reality at all. What is 'characterless' does not happen, cannot be grasped, commented upon, priced or treasured as achievement.

A supplementary or parallel elsewhere is from English literary criticism, if you need. S.T. Coleridge distinguishes between Primary and Secondary Imagination in his *Biographia Literaria*. Here 'Imagination' does not mean what is not real or fanciful, as is the usual confusion. All 'imagination' is grounded in life, its reality or experience. You cannot imagine what is beyond your experience, what has never happened in life, or even as a possibility in life. "A silver man standing on a golden mountain, drinking diamond water" is an idiotic construction of a mad mind beyond anyone's grasp. "A barren woman's son riding the horse of a mirage, wearing sky flowers" is the standard equivalent of this idiocy in the Indian philosophical idiom. Vedantic experience is not an equivalent of this tomfoolery! When Coleridge refers to primary Imagination, he means the prime nature of things as they happen, as first occurrences, with or without much grasp of significance of things that have

happened. A buffalo stands in the middle of a road when a speedy vehicle runs towards it, on its way. The driver's horn-sound is heard by the animal. But the 'meaning' that if the animal does not jerk away, death is imminent may not be quickly grasped. In a minute or two that meaning may indeed be grasped also. But a second or third time a similar experience - not the same identical one, which is against the grammar of reality and is so ruled out — happens, the animal grasps the meaning more quickly. In fact, in animals like man, this conjuring up of that first experience for better clarity, in later moments, and with joyful efforts, a recalling of that experience for better accounting and for artistic recreation, interpretation, for a fulsome, full-dimensioned work of art - is what is called Secondary Imagination. This is at the very root of culture or civilization - corresponding to **Savikalpa** - and he who dismisses it as unreal would be out of senses, a vandal or anti-art person. It is 'secondary', not in the sense of 'being unimportant' 'of no significance', or 'something without which you can manage life'. All culture or artistic expression, all that makes life joyful, worthwhile, meaningful, closely-knit in terms of mutually connected or interpreted life, even for non-artists, but as developed people with higher sensibilities - what we call sensibility - depends on this aspect of Imagination, **Savikalpa**. It is noteworthy that Ramanuja has restored the meaning of life, of art, of culture the very nature of experience, when he reverses the prevalent wrong notion "that life runs from **Savikalpa** to **Nirvikalpa**" to its *vice-versa*! Primary experience is what 'happens' first; but it is not valuable simply because of its 'firstness'! Many 'firsts' melt away into mere nothingness, if they are not re-established in life with meaning or significance; re-establishment, re-calling, re-'cognition' is no philosophical sin, or 'our-made' and so 'artificial'. An experience in which

you do not participate is no 'experience' at all, much less 'yours' or 'mine'. This hearty, burdensome legacy of Buddhism has been repudiated by Ramanuja in great detail in his Preamble to the Brahma Sutras, and is briefly rebuffed in two appropriate contexts of his Commentary on the *Gita* ; (in chapter 2, and chapter 13.)*

(5) The place of **Bhakti** in Vedanta is restored to the heights of **Upasana, Brahma Vidya**, a mode or **Brahman-Intuition**, back and away from a debased earlier interpretation of it as a mere "mind-cleansing process" for the dull-witted ones, who cannot do away without an imagined object of worship or meditation. Details are plenty in *Vedartha Sangraha*.[†] The order in Yoga is progress from **Karma Yoga**, to knowledge or **Jnana Yoga** and through it to **Bhakti Yoga** as the *Gita* shows. You cannot isolate **Jnana Yoga**, run away with it, and in contempt for **Bhakti Yoga**! That would be distortion of not merely the text but also of experience. **Bhakti** is not foolish adoration of the undeserving or unworthy. It is a species of 'knowledge' as you cannot love what you do not understand or close to you, in intimate relationship. **Brahmanandi Tankacharya** is shown to be a supporter of this view from among the ancient masters, in the *Laghu Siddhanta* ('A Minor conclusion' part) of *Sri Bhashyam*. Without this base, any talk of **Bhakti** in the context of the *Gita* would only be a concession to those that do not 'dare' to the heights of the 'Nihil' as a worthy goal of life to reach, as the Absolutist would hold.

(6) Ramanuja repudiates the distinction between two kinds of 'Release' or 'Salvation' — one while in life, known as **sadeha mukti**, and the other beyond life, an actual

♦ *Gita* : Ch 2 - verse 11, and Ch 13 - verse 1.

■ See J. A. B. Van Buitenin's translation and ed. Pub : Deccan college, Pune.

movement away from space and time ; or **videha mukti**. There is no such thing, literally, as **Jivanmukti** ; What is meant when the *Upanishad* says: "Here and now you can attain God" is that you can have tastes of moment of God-union, while in yogic moments.* But it is not in the nature of things to have both a bound state of experience, a finiteness in space and time, and a release from it, while still in it ; this is a sheer impossibility. What is meant in such texts is that 'a kind of release, or taste of it' is possible here. In fact the Gita also alludes to it.† "If you have your mind in equanimity, untrammelled by tantalising dualities, you have already conquered rebirth and are liberated. "But other emphatic contexts or statements meaning an actual journey, the **nivritti marga**, are not annulled or sublated by these and such other worded statements in all **Vedanta**.

Instances can be multiplied ; but the spirit of reconciliation and the skill, the intention for synthesis, readjustment detailed so far will do to demonstrate the direction of Ramanuja's commentary. Negationism in any form is another anathema for the Acharya

(7) **God as unity, unifier, All-inclusive All-Pervasive Divinity:** Perhaps, the greatest service of Ramanuja to philosophy as **Vedanta** is the rehabilitation of God beyond sectarianism, beyond dry-absolutism, beyond voices of cacophony, and the re-establishment of Divinity as One in All and All in One, the One in Many, and the Many in One. Unfortunately, interpreters of **Vedanta** to the West in the middle of the last century, like Dr. Radakrishnan, Hiriyanna and followers of the Absolutistic school of **Vedanta**, and their counterparts in the west like Maxmuller are disinclined to

◆ **Atra Brahma Samashmita** (*Br. A. Up*)
 ■ Ch. 5, verse 19

accept this status of Ramanuja as Vedantic interpreter and have tended to dub him as a sectarian Vaishnava 'theologian' at the most, contributing to popular Hinduism, bringing God to the hearts of credulous mobs, that needed temple worship and some sort of social communion with God at its centre ; the higher job of intellectually establishing **Vedanta** on a higher footing of broad Absolutism beyond all theistic or anthropomorphic, or narrow school-affiliation to this or that school, is put to the credit of Shankara! Unfortunately Swamy Vivekananda too tended to hold this view in his numerous writings and assessments, and this lop-sided view still holds in narrow circles, in the days of quantum physics, biotechnological revolutions, and advanced researches and experimentation in psychology and other fields of understanding the human personality and its environment! The job of **updating Vedanta** and reconciling it with these and other branches of modern knowledge remains far from examination, let alone synthesis or re-interpretation or readjustment. Shankara is no less 'theistic' if the term has a negative meaning still, as Van Buiterin and Thibaut point out.

This was the problem in the days of the *Bhagavad Gita* and **Sri Krishnavatara** too! That is the significance of the need for the teachings of Chapter 10 and Chapter 11! What magnificent synthesis!! Let us explain :

When the **Veda** says : "Brahman is one, but the wise speak of Him as Many",* what is meant is the unity of God conceptually, and His manlyness functionally, in individual grasps. Infinity is felt and experienced in finite grasps at the practical and actual levels of life. Infinity is abstract, while finiteness is concrete. Why should one contradict the other? or be inferior or superior to the other? It is in this latter selective

* Ekam Sat Vipra bahudha vadanti (Rig Veda)

'interpretation' you have the seeds of perversity, narrowness and the prejudice to reject what you cannot accommodate in your preconceived thought system! It is this imbalance that Ramanuja sought to rectify and restore the balance.

Or, see this : "Some wise speak of him as Agni; others as Vayu or Prajapati" etc.* The ruling or vision is the same. Names are the results of functional grasps of one God in fields of various activity. This interpretation and synthetic grasp is the legacy of Etymologists like Yaska, and great unifiers like Shaunaka, author of Brihad Devata, which is a thesis on this elaboration of God's functional 'manyness' in His grandeur as a Unity, conceptually.

This is the vision of **Vyasa, Valmiki, Shuka, Manu, Yajnavalkya, Bodhayana, Tanka, Guhadeva, Dramida, Srivatsanka, Bhartri Prapancha** and others.

Mischievous categories, untenable logically, textually and experimentally, were introduced in the post-Buddhistic period, in pre-Ramanuja days to divide this unity into a "respectable abstraction" and "a disreputable practicality" for the dull-minded, reserving the earlier "luxury" for those that tended towards atheism under Buddhism! Actually this 'abstraction' was a concession to those who dared not visualise God as a Grand Personality holding all this universe in His majesty, comprehensiveness, and supreme meaningfulness! The later step ought to be the object of enduring and lasting Yogic Unity.^o Things went wrong, the Buddhist way, a second time after incalculable disservices of the Sankhyans! This was further complicated by 'orientalists' of the 'West' and their Indian followers at home who thought and wrote in English,

* Enam eke Vadantyanim Marutosnye prajapatim! (*Manu Smriti*)

^o As exemplified in the Purusha Sukta (*Rg. Veda*), in the Vishnu Sahasranama and the Visvarupa Ch. of the *Gita*.

rather than being at home in Sanskrit and Vedic thought or its all-encompassing vision of Unity! Sri Aurobindo rebuts and repudiates Dr. Radhakrishnan in his elaborations in: *On the Veda, Hymns to the Mystic Fire, Eight Upanishads* and even in *Life Divine* and *Synthesis of Yoga*, in a controversy centring around whether *Vedic Samhitas* add to our Upanishadic knowledge or a wasteful lumber of 'mumbo-jumbo', verbal juggley! Sri Aurobindo held that **Vedic** thought was one and uniform in spite of language styles of difference, Symbolism, liturgical terminology, sacrificial-ritualistic elaborations of spiritual meanings in elaborate 'dramatised' versions; while Radhakrishnan wrote that **Upanishads** are independent thought structure, and not a 'fall' from Samhita heights! Ramanuja and Aurobindo share the same category of maintaining unity and not cacophony, in the Vedic meanings. You can verify this in the writings of both these writers.

A minor question : "In that case, how come Ramanuja belongs to the Vaishnava fold of Agamic thoughts of worship, and sectarian thought? Is not **Vedanta** above this?"

Answer: All *Brahma-Sutra* commentators, for that matter, are 'Vaishnavas', except the post Ramanuja **Srikantha** (in whose spurious name Appaya Dixita introduced **Shaivism** for the first time into this literature, and still later Sripathi Panditaradhya of the *Srikarabhashya*.) **Vishnu** means the All-Pervasive, All-Inclusive, the Perfect and the Comprehensive! To view Him as sectarian is in itself a sectarian angle! Even **Shankara** identifies his Saguna God as **Vishnu** in at least a dozen or more instances in his commentaries on the *Upanishads* and the *Brahma Sutra*, even where the texts do not do so! The concept of 'Absolute' sublates all ideas of God in Name and Form and is no answer for our questions or problems. The dichotomy between the

Formless and the Formed is unwarranted and is itself a product of sectarian thinking. Secondly it is the Agamas that came to substitute the **Vedic** meditation and sacrificial mode of Divine communion, when they got discredited and disrespected and disused due to both Buddhist pressure and influence, and adverse propaganda against God as Person by the extreme ritualists with in the **Vedic** fold. All followers of the **Vedic** tradition in the post-Kumarila period, including Shankara, are **Bhagavathas** without exception, as their works testify. A **Bhagavata** is no sectarian, as a **Vaidika**, as he views God as All-pervasive, and this view comprehends **Shiva** and all other aspects of God functionally true to the spirit of **Purusha Sukta** and the **Sahasranama** and the **Vishvarupa** chapter of the *Gita*. It is in Tamil Nadu That **Shaiva — Vaishnava** controversies aggravated this totality of comprehension and plagued the philosophical field with sectarian conflicts. Persecution added to it and compounded this trouble. It is unreasonable to attribute the off-shoots and their shortcomings to a system maker, who attempted the very opposite of narrowness, escapism and exclusionism, in his catholicity of outlook and actual writings which attempted assimilation and amalgamation as never before since the days of **Sri Krishna** and **Vyasa**.

Agamic modes of worship do vary, in rituals and minor factorisation in the process of God-communion. It would be wrong and disastrous to mix up what does not correspond or collaborate. In the *Upanishads* themselves human personality is factorised in:

- (a) a five-fold sheath system with God as **Anandamaya** as Blissful at the core, and food, breath, and mind sheaths as outer rings of the soul, ensouled by God (in the *Anandamaya Vidya* and *Tait. Upanishad*), and

- (b) a three-fold states of existence or experience or awareness at the wakeful, the dream, and Deep Sleep states (in the *Mandukya Upanishad*), and so on.

Are they contradictory sects or schools? Can you take one and reject the other? This preference and partiality if you exercise, will lead you to sectarianism, and not Ramanuja's attempts to see all in God as comprehensive as Vishnu. So much for the ignorant charge!



SRI RAMANUJA AND THE ANCIENT MASTERS

Synthesis, perpetual re-adjustment, reassertion of the eternal values basic to life as discovered by the ageless seers of the past — these are the hall marks of Hinduism. Vyasa, Sri Krishna and Ramanuja are some of the best exemplars of this process, and naturally there is identity of views and efforts.

Everybody knows what predecessors of Sri Ramanuja enabled him in this task of assimilation of the best of the past and its updated interpretations. Valmiki, Vyasa, Shuka, Shaunaka, Manu among there are those illustrious ancient masters whose themes, totality of imports, intentions and efforts are pressed into service by him with care and comfort and without any distortions, contextually, as admitted by admirers and adversaries alike. Footsteps of Nathamuni, Yamuna, Mahapurna, to name just a few, among those that preceded him immediately, were there to help him and guide him in the darkness and deluge of misinterpretations that prevailed, then. Buddhism, Jainism, Purvamimamsa, Sankhya, Illusionism, Absolutism of many varieties were there to be tackled and answered. The Hymns of Alvars were there as devotional literature with a strong and well-knit philosophical base. With this literature which enjoyed immense popularity among those that never bothered about plaguing intellectual puzzles, riddles and paradoxes in the name of intellectualism or philosophy at the level of the so called 'higher-ups' in life, and efforts of Nathamuni and Yamuna at the other end trying to cure those higher-ups off their pet absurdities in the name of metaphysics, it was easy for Ramanuja to restore balance

to the understanding of the *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the *Upanishadic* interpretation in the form of *Brahma Sutra*. Attempts of **Bhaskara** and **Yadava Prakasha**, just earlier and contemporaneous figures had miserably failed as **Bhedabheda** versions to reconcile Unity and Difference, Identity and Flux in **Vedantic** thought. That Ramanuja successfully attempted this reconciliation with ease, demonstrates our point of view. Ramanuja had no use for dogmas in **Vedanta**, however great the personages behind them might be. He actually rebelled against **Yadava Prakasha**, among Sanskrit **Vedantins**, and **Maladhara** among those who interpreted the thousand Hymns of Nammalwar among Tamil Vedantins. Additionally, the Acharya took care to see that doctrinal elements were strictly kept out of Vedantic discussions and disputations, so that nobody could accuse him of prejudice, partiality, perversion and theological biases of any sectarian types. He loved the compositions of the Alvars, but kept them out of discussions in the context of Sanskrit **Vedanta**, though deeply influenced by them and indebted to them. He loved the Agamas deeply, but commented on them only to the extent that *the Sutrakara* permitted, or involved him in. The Epics and Puranas are used to the extent that the very adversaries use them for a different conclusion. He is therefore a full metaphysician as much as any before him or after him, though Radhakrishnan and Hiriyanna class him with 'theologians' in the prejudiced bad sense of the term.

In the matter of his commentary on the *Gita* we must observe that he not merely not forgets the main contexts of the Epic out of which the text arises, but also reinforces his interpretation with profuse and timely quotations from it; a task that **Vedanta Desika** the author of the Gloss — *Tatparya Chadrika* — on it, continues to perfection.

When we see how shaky are the interpreters of the rival schools in precedents, and contexts and supporting texts, and how they themselves confess their limitations or helplessness, often, unwillingly or indirectly, we see the veracity, faithfulness, uprightness of Ramanuja's commentary! He is **individualistic** in rediscovering lost original meanings, but **traditional** in his overall outlook or frame work of thought, which is also a remarkable achievement. Occasions are far too many and forbidding in our attempts to quote and illustrate. One or two will be tempting, and you see the contrasts with others :

See his meaning of

"Yavanartha Udapane"¹

"Ashochyan"²

"udarah"³

"Na mam duskritino"⁴

"Ananyachetah satatam"⁵

"Idam shariram"⁶

"Ananyah Chintayanto"⁷

"Patram pushpam"⁸

"Sarva dharman"⁹

"Manmana bhava"¹⁰

"Urdhvamulam"¹¹

"Upadrashta"¹²

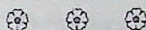
"apichet suduracharah"¹³

"Samoham sarvabhuteshu"¹⁴

"Sambhavami Yuge Yuge"¹⁵,

1	2-46	5	7-18	8	8-14	10	9-26	13	15-1
2	2-11	6	7-18	9	13-1	11	18-66	14	13-22
3	9-22	7	9-34 & 18-65			12	9-30	15	9-29
4	4-8								

and his excellent connective writeups called “**Sangati**” from Chapter to Chapter, from idea to idea, from theme to theme to build up the edifice of the structure of the grand totality of meanings. The nobility of Preface itself draws you to the core of the teaching of the text, and the conclusion leaves no loose-ends. It is a perfection in the Art of Commentary-exercise, if we may so term it. This is because of his earnestness and sincerity in unravelling the text and its meaning for the reader, rather than impose something from the outside.



SRI VEDANTA DESIKA AND HIS "TATPARYA CHANDRIKA" – SOME HIGHLIGHTS

"When there is already a commentary, where is the need for further elaboration, clarification or embellishment by way of a 'Gloss' or 'Tika', or 'Vyakhyana' or a sub-commentary?" – one may ask.

A teacher of mine, addicted to Western 'Individualism' and the "analytical criticism" of the Cambridge School of thought – once remarked casually and sweepingly that all Indian tradition whether in literature, philosophy, aesthetics or medicine or other sciences and arts consists of only secondary thoughts by way of commentaries, sub-commentaries, and further subsidiary elaborations, and it is not a free development based on originality as in the West! After being shocked for a moment, I asked him if he had any knowledge of any Sanskrit commentary on any text, literary - drama, poetry, epic or 'champu'* – or Upanishads, or the Gita and Brahma Sutra! He confessed his ignorance, but asserted that he had learnt of it from his knowledgeable friends. Then I explained to him that Hindu culture is based on the concept of "Sahridaya"; and 'criticism' could arise where one is superior to the other of the original ; or where disagreements were unavoidable; or still better, where new thoughts or variant and radical disagreements arose entirely new works also arose. This was growth, individuality and tradition too in a novel way. Where works of the type of *Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Brahma Sutras, Upanishads*

* A composition using prose and poetry in a lovely admixture, peculiar to Sanskrit literature and other vernaculars.

♦ Meaning "one with a similar bent of mind, open and receptive."

and the basic Vedic Samhita texts were concerned, nobody could excel these basic texts of Hinduism, and so the real problem was of understanding their core ideas, ideals, vision and primordial directive principals of life — understanding and so the commentary tradition was exceptionally useful and actually arose to fulfil this need. Tradition does not blind one here to his individuality of exposition. Where one entirely deviated from the basics and wrote, criticism took on the form of rebel or rival traditions as is the case with not only heterodox systems like Jainism and Buddhism but also within the orthodox fold, as in **Sankhya, Yoga, Vaisesika, Pashupatha, Nyaya, Shaktha, Shaiva** and other new systems, each of which states a new tradition of its own. This did not happen to any of the Western thinkers, men of literature or science, and so confusions prevail; systems come and go, even thoughts that ought to endure as useful (as in the case of Plato) disappear as out of date by sheer disuse! Then I asked him if he could understand a Shakespeare or Milton without the help of a A.W. Verity, or Wordsworth without a Webb or similar other authors who had spent whole life times in the study of these authors. I tried to dispel his prejudices that 'scholarship' was static, while 'criticism' was dynamic! What clumsy categories of whimsicality or eccentricity!! I also pointed out that there was also "critical appreciation" or "critiques" which did not mean intemperate attacks on the originals. The discussion was inconclusive. I am not sure whether such prejudices have given way to rational and genuine and indigenous modes of understanding of our own texts, at least in free India! Hence it is not out of the way, I hope, if an attempt is made here to estimate **Sri Desika's** Gloss for its individual contribution, its originality and yet its faithfulness to the original and the tradition behind.



WHAT IS A 'GLOSS'? WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS?
WHAT IS ITS SCOPE OR LIMITATION?

A '**tika**' or 'vyakyana' is a kind of perusal in writing, devoted to bringing out the best of hidden or suggested further meanings in the original, supplying the background, the missing links if any, clarifying doubts that may naturally arise, compare with other similar texts, resolve controversies, provide additional material to enjoy or enrich the original meanings, establish them against ignorant attacks or unwanted perversions, and to set the work in its proper frame or background and help the reader towards better appreciation. Though humbly called a 'tika' or 'vyakhyana', it does expound or expand, or explain the original as much as an A.C.Bradley, Dowden, Wilson Knight, Verity, Quiller Couch, H.B.Charlton, Brookes and others as in the case of a Shakespeare and other similar 'critics' even on modern writers like Yeats and Eliot. The 'critic' in the commentater does not 'destroy', 'demote', 'demolish' any achievements, celebreties of the past or present as does an F.R.Leavis or Wittgenstein or Bertrand Russell ; this unrestrained 'freedom' for vandalism, mistaken for free thinking does not take anyone anywhere. It only provides new airs to dilettantes and dandays and promotes irresponsibility without scholarship or considerations behind tentative views. Our concept of a **Tika** or **Vyakhyana** is noble, purposeful, considerate besides being useful and bound to realities of text, tradition, honour and established lines of interpretation. That is how a Govindaraja, a Nilakantha, a Sridhara or Viraraghava, Mallinatha, an Appyadixita on classical literature and the

Epics, or a Sayana, Bhatta Bhaskara, Mahidhara, Yaska, Shounaka and others on the Vedas are still relevant here. It is difficult to understand Shankara without an Anandagiri, Sureswara, Vachaspati Mishra, as much as a Ramanuja without a Sudarshan Suri, Vedanta Desika or Rangaramanuja or others. We need not be apologetic or ashamed of these enriching attempts. One does not understand how criticism without understanding or enjoyment is 'superior' to understanding or enjoyment without rejection or relegation even before you consider the work in its entirety! So much for Western prejudices.



“TATPARYA CHANDRIKA”

This work in its meaning of the title means : “Shedding new light like the gentle moonlight on the implications of the original.” Moonlight in the Hindu tradition is the required atmosphere for the proper growths of herbs, creepers, **vanaspati**, **oushadhi** category of life-sustaining Ayurvedic herbs. **Soma** helps this growth, who is not merely a Vedic God in Supervision of vital growths of creepers and plants, but-also the moon in Pauranic mythology. Hence ‘chandrika’ which means ‘moonlight’ is appropriate for the title of the Gloss on Ramanuja’s *Bhashya* which is sought to be ‘nurtured’ and ‘nourished’ by way of additional ‘juice content’, and vital enrichment.

Highlights

We have said that a commentator has plenty of scope of additions of meanings, enlargements of original ideas and hinted meanings, lying obscure in contexts requiring elaboration, clarification and contrasts for proper appreciation in right perspectives. This freedom is no violation or distortion of the original text in so far as it keeps to the bounds of the aims of the main text and the direction of the developed meaning. Critics who misunderstand the scope of a commentary as limited to imitation, repetition and ‘class-room’ type of notes and ‘guides’ of a commercial type will do well to remember this feature of an ancient commentary or gloss.

We shall illustrate with some well chosen examples:-

- I. Look at the question of the blind king Dhritarashtra

in the very begining of the text of the *Gita*, as a prologue :

“My sons and the Pandavas, I hear, have assenbled in the Kurukshetra which is an ancient centre of pilgrimage for Dharmic observances, with the intention of warring with each others. Oh Sanjaya, tell me, what are they doing? ” ८

Note that all three Acharyas, the famous system-makers of **Vedanta**, are silent on the implications of this initial verse, in its literary beauties, suggested meanings, and the background of the blind king’s mind, and a glaring treasure even philosophically worth-while!

The question is ridiculous even from a superficially literary point of view, and nowhere is it directly answered in the text in its considerable length. It is quite likely that we mistake it for an initial preface of the text, or a customary question of an inquisitive old blind king who is naturally anxious to know what happened on the warfield, being himself unable to take part in the war, or view it directly. For he knows that the parties at war are there assembled with the explicit understanding of fighting with each other, to eliminate each others, fight to finish – so to say – and win it for themselves. The word “**Yuyutsavah**” makes this all clear. When the blind king knows this much, that war is not a joke, and both parties cannot win, and it is therefore a tense situation, now with no more scope for negotiations for peace, for mediation or cessation of hostilities, and it is too late to contemplate any preventive measures, what is the meaning of the question within the same verse, “What did they do?” — “**Kim akurvata?**” People assembled to fight, must fight, and die, one way or the other! What other option is open? Can they run away? Do miracles happen to prevent slaughter on this

८ Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre samaveta yuyutsavah |
Mamakah pandavaschaiva kimakurvata, Sanjaya || (1-1)

scale of enormity? What could be the meaning of the king? Does he have no meaning except a casual enquiry, callously made in a mood of idle curiosity?

That does not seem to be in keeping with nature of his studied acts of crookedness or their intentions, and the histories of atrocities to his discredit! There must be a hidden **load** in this heavy question. That **load** is both literarily well suggested and well understood for its philosophical implication by Sanjaya, the narrator. Here is Desika who tries to elaborate that hint, in a well thought out, and justified emphasis :

See how : It can only mean the old man's intention to know the results of this war in advance! But how can a war be decided in advance? Only one way — when the enemy runs away, frightened by the size of the opponents' army, its well structured condition, or its stalwarts, the heros, the sheer numbers on the other side! That **was** the expectation! But it did not materialise; the enemy **had** arrived, fully prepared. Still a further possibility lay in Yudhishtira's withdrawal out of his misplaced 'compassion', his excessive or boundless 'pacifism', or call it a boneless hero's cowardice when it came to face actualities in life, as always in this case of an ever vacillating leader of the opposition army ; "did that happen?" "Are there enough soldiers on the other side to promise a mere glimmer of hope for win, for the demoralised enemy?" — that seems to be the question, hidden : Desika makes references to this in two instances, in the well-phrased commentary :

1. "Suyodhana Vijayabubhatsaya kritasya prashnasya,...."[□]
2. "Suyodhana vijayabubhutsaya kritasya prashnasya sakshad uttaram vaktum ashaknuvan,...."*

[□] Initial verse ; Desika's independent preamble on 1-1.

* On 18-78. concluding section.

Further Desika suggests that “Sanjaya did not wish to offer a direct answer, as it was the nature of the people among **Kuru** and **Panchala** races to suggest meanings in half-spelt words, broken sentences, and suggestive idioms rather than directly!”

“**Ardhoktah kurupanchalah’ iti matva
gudhabhisandhih samvadadbhutatvadikam
uktavan| Tavatapi ajanatah sarvatmanan-
dhasya sakshaduttaram aha – ‘kimatra
bahuna’ iti.**”

The enjoyable import can be summed up as follows :

- (1) There is a famous verse in the Karna Parvan of the *Mahabharatha*, in the original itself, which reviews the natures of the people of this nation spread to north, east, west and south, to the effect :

“The Magadha people - (Modern Biharis) understand the minds of others without their actually saying anything, but by merely looking at them in mind-reading; The Kosala people are prompted by gazes as aids in this ; The Kuru-panchala people require something half-said to infer the other left-out half to gather the full meaning. It is only the Southerners who require everything to be completely spelt out before they can gather the full meaning.”*

This work, this verse, suggests that people like Sanjaya, belonging to the **Kuru** race, have the nature of only suggesting things half and half. Just as Dhritarashtra did not ask the question directly sanjaya also did not answer directly, but only suggested the answer indirectly.

* Inditagastu magadhah, prekshitajastu kosalah |
Ardhoktah kuru panchalah, sarvokthah Dakshina pathah ||
(Karna Parvan 45-35, Gorakhpur edn)

- (2) How? we may ask : thus : Instead of the direct reply, he went on narrating how Arjuna, initially, was hesitant to lift up the bow against stalwarts and common elders like Bhishma and Drona, and how slowly Sri Krishna removed his misgivings and revived his courage of conviction to act up to the expectations proper to his status and duty to himself, to society, and God and so how finally now Arjuna was ready to annihilate the enemy-army ; this would mean that where Arjuna was ready for action, and Sri Krishna ready to initiate him into it, and stand as the bed-rock for the spiritual courage required for it, there was absolutely no scope left for Duryodhana to win! Still, the bewildered blind king hopes against hope for an unjustified victory for his son!
- (3) Hence the final verse of the *Gita* nails this misplaced expectation in a cataclysmic sweep of meaning :

“Where Sri Krishna belongs and acts as **Yogeswara**, and Where Arjuna the obedient, weilds his bow, as Sri Krishna’s agent divine, — there belongs success, wealth, development, auspiciousness, and right and lasting perception, as I can see.”*

This again is an indirect but a bolder answer : meaning : “Only Arjuna will win, not your son ; because Arjuna has God’s support, and your son none; Krishna in Yogeshwara * — i.e. He can endow His devotee with will, strength, vision, courage and a hundred other virtues required for right action; and

♦ Yatra Yogeswarah Krishno yatra Partho dhanurdharah |
Tatra Srih vijayo bhutih dhruva nitih matirmama || (18-78).

⌘ “Yogeswarah-Kritsnasya ucchavacharupenavasthitasya, chetanachetanasya ca vastunah yeye swabhavayoga, tesham sarvesham yoganam iswarah....”
(Ramanuja on 18-78.)

blind, the ineligible for Grace with pride, fallacies, wrong motives and calculations and foolish company and fool-hardiness, as per their Karma.” This meaning is brought out in Ramanuja’s commentary at the end in faint suppositions and Desika elaborates it : “You have not caught the meaning of my narration. I have told you in detail how God instructed Arjuna about the true nature of the Divine Self, how He revealed His Cosmic Vision, His Cosmic Form and so on, pointing to the expected victory of the Pandavas in a short while. I am now making explicit only this, that you have not cared to grasp.”♦

Thus if you read the first and last verses of the *Gita*, the question of the blind king, and the direct answer to it by Sanjaya, you have the whole meaning of *the Gita*, contained in between, in all its eighteen detailed Chapters, spilt over multiple ideas, sub-ideas, involving all Vedanta, its principal direction and its final message to man!

Tell me, which other Acharya has achieved this miracle of meaning, in which other commentary, over which other verses of *the Gita*? The text was there before him, lying between Sri Krishna and numerous commentators over thousands of years, with this treasure still hidden there but unrevealed even to the enlightened! That is **Desika’s Tika** and its beauty, value, and use.

II. Take another instance for example : This is now from Chapter 3. Here is Arjuna’s question about who is it that goads on a man to an evil act against his will or wish, out of force,

♦ “Anabhiijnasya te Bhagavata Arjunaya adhyatma upadesha, vaishva rupya prakashanadibhi Pandavavijaya suchakairalam; suchita meva spashtam vadami ityuchyate iti bhavah” (Desika on the *Bhashya* at 18-78)

as it were, if nobody wants to be evil, and be pure, as we all expect! °

Sri Krishna answers that evil is verily harboured in the mind of man itself; it is the same that takes on the form of desire, initially, and turns into hate, when desire is not fulfilled; it is desire that veils and overrules the intelligence and all the senses of man and musters them all into a final unified command to ruin man completely.^a

But look : Sri Krishna uses three poetic images to suggest three shades of how evil covers the mind of man:

- (1) That of fire in the altar being enveloped by **smoke** and even engendered along with the kindling of that fire invariably.

Dhumena avriyate vahnih *

- (2) That of **dust** on a mirror, which gets setted on it with all your repeated attempts to keep it clean of dust, again and again;
- (3) and of **extra flesh-growth** in a womb that surrounds an embryo, even in the act of conception of the child, at the very birth!

Yathadarsho malena cha |
Yatholbenavrito garbha ||

The three Acharyas are silent on the meanings of these pointed images, these analogies, with pregnant imports.

See how Desika brings out the meanings :

-
- *Atha kena prayuktosyam papam charathi purushah |*
Anicchannapi Varshneya baladiva niyojitah || (Gita-3-36)
- △ Verses 37, onwards.
- ❖ Verse 3-38

- (1) **Smoke** is produced along with fire and so is natural. So is desire as evil, natural to life and so is at its very source, as an appendage from previous births, and accrued Karmic fruits.*
- (2) **Dust** settles on a cleaned mirror, repeatedly, tirelessly, and with no finality on your part of efforts, without leaving you in a complete state of satisfaction of dustlessness.*
- (3) The **extra flesh growth** surrounding an embryo is something that the embryo by itself cannot tear, remove, or avoid, and suggests helplessness on the part of life without God's Grace and our surrender to Him.*

III. Take a third instance in Chapter 4., called **Avatara Adhyaya** where Sri Krishna teaches about the nature of His Descents, purpose of the Descents and their timings of manifestations.

Are Avatars real or illusions? Is **Sri Krishnavatara** real or a mirage, or mere hallucination? We have to note in passing, unfortunately, two negative views :

- (1) **Shankara** views it as mere 'illusion' or 'appearance'*
- (2) **Madhva** follows : "I appear to be born, as one among those born"[□]
- (3) **Jayatirtha** adds : "This adduces a reason for the illusion of Avatara"*

♦ "Anadivasananubandhitvena Sahajam ||"

⌘ "Nivrittasyapi punah punah upadivasha agamam ||"

■ Svecchaya nivarthayitum ashakyatvam cha darshayitum dristanta trayopadanam (on 3-38)

❖ Svamayaya dehavaniva, jata iva cha lokanugrahm kurvan lakshyate || ('He appears to possess a body as it were, appears to take birth as it was, with a view to protect the world'- In the Preamble.)

□ "Jata iva pratiye" (4-6)

♦ Anena janmabhraanteh nimittamuktam.. Bhraanteh upadanamaha.. tamorupaya || (on 4-6).

Contrast Ramanuja who notes that **Avatars** are as real as life, and it is the actual manifestation of God in historical cross-sections, vissicitudes, crises, without His sacrificing His Divinity and at the same time assuring a role in history in terms of real life. Sri Krishna is as real as Arjuna, for instance, and it is to emphasise this undeniable reality that Arjuna is mentioned as an example in this very context. Read the original verse :

“Bahuni me vyatitani janmani tava Charjuna”[□]

“Many are my Descents, like your numerous births,”— it means *Not* that Arjuna doubts his reality or his birth! What he doubts is how could Sri Krishna have taught **Karma Yoga** to **Vivaswan** in the beginning of a **manvantara**? How do we explain the gap of this time? It is this question that the Lord is answering ; and not the needless doubt whether Arjuna is real or unreal. This question is irrelevant ; but what is the meaning of Krishna bringing it in? Ramanuja adds :

“ ‘Tava cha’ iti drishtantataya upadanaccha ||”

“It is meant as a parallel example, to justify the point of view that Krishna is as real as Arjuna standing before him .”[○]

Desika adds: “When the lord says ‘**tavacha**’, to answer an unasked question, what is meant is to confirm the reality of **Avatara** with an undeniable example, and without which that reality cannot be proved or driven home. Arjuna’s is no mirage or illusion of life-manifestation. None can say, it is merely an appearance! When such is the case, how can anyone doubt “Krishna’s **avatara**?”” (We may note that

□ 4-5.

○ Same verse.

among modern writers Sri Aurobindo upholds this view of Ramanuja elaborately; the German poet Goethe wrote a Treatise on it ; Ravidranath Tagore wrote too on this difficult concept to understand. Hinduism cannot be understood without the reality of God's **Avataras** or History's reality.)

In the same context of the same Chapter, we note this further: Note the order of purposes of the **Avatara** :

- (1) **Protection of the Good, the Saintly, the Pious, the Devout;**
- (2) **Destruction of the Evil, the Devilish, the ungodly, Demoniac.***
- (3) **The establishment of the Right Order and the Law of Dharma**

Shankara and **Madhva** do not seem to have attached any particular significance to this order, of preference in so delineating the purpose of the **Avataras**. Routine comments have been made in passing by them as all Hindus take for granted. Actually **Madhva** adds an adversary note, contradictory to the intentions expressed in the verse to the effect that :

“The protection of the world and of the righteous need not be through the very instrumentality of the **Avataras**! Actually God can achieve them as a matter of his ‘leela’ or sportive act, by His very nature, as He is without someone to direct Him as

♦ “na janmapratibhasa iti, tava cha iti aprishtasya arthasya upadanamapi etat satyatva drishtantabhiprayena, tadantarena na ghatate | Na cha Arjunasya janma mithya ; tasya va tathatwa pratibhasah | Tat sambhave va Krishnajanmani kutosya samshayah - iti ||”

We must note : It is natural for **Shankara** to hold on to the view of the unreality of **Avatars** as he starts with the theory of Absolutism or non-relational Brahman. What is perplexing is **Madhva's** denying that reality in the context of God and life being both centrally real to his philosophy! How do we reconcile?

* **Paritranaya sadhunam; vinashayacha dushkrutam**

from above — He is such as to act as He wills.”²²

This only reinforces the view of ‘Avatara’ as illusion! The example of Arjuna’s reality, the specific order of purposes explicitly stated here have no value, ultimately, as God can achieve anything by mere ‘will’ or ‘wish’ like a magician bringing something out of nothing, or getting anything to vanish out of reality!! Creation, its rules, principles have no ‘bindings’ on God, even as sportive acts!!! He can make, unmake, remake, destroy, things out of strength and will. Grace, compassion and the world-order do not figure here for any consideration, at all.

Jayatirtha actually goes to the extent of denying any liberation from bondage to those who “realise the secret of **Avatara**hood of God”, against the express intent and utterance of Sri Krishna in the same context :•

“He who knows this nature, purpose, and timing of my **Avataras** in principle, conceptually, shall attain me, and not go back to sorrowful cycles of rebirth again, after leaving his body of mortality here.”²³

Apart from these oddities in other commentaries, we can come back to the original text to see what **Sri Krishna** means when he says that the **Avatara** is meant to:

- (1) Protect the Righteous and
- (2) Destroy Evil.

Questions arise as to who are the **Sadhus**, the “righteous”, and what is the nature of the protection they require, or desire from God, and how does, God oblige them.

☒ Na janmanaiva paritranadi karyam iti niyamaha Tathapi lilaya swabhavena cha yatheshhtachari

● Bhagavajjanmadi jnana matrena muktiruchyate iti pratiti nirasata

☐ Ch 4-9. This **Phalasruti** is extraordinary, as it comes even before a grand statement at the end of the text, and **Ramanuja** does full justice to it, and **Desika** follows him.

Secondly what is 'destruction' in God's scheme, especially as Sri Krishna says that He is equal to all, without extra preferences or partialities.^o

Sri Ramanuja Comments :

(a) "Sadhus are the best among God's devotees, who cannot live without Him even for a moment, who actually long to see Him even with physical eyes, hear of His Divine exploits and so on."

This is no mere routine description of a devotee or **Bhaktha**, as we tend to take. So **Desika** elaborates the implications as follows :-

- (i) They are devotees that have given up all other deities in preference to Sri Krishna, as the Supreme refuge, all other means of God-attainment other than self-surrender, all other desires than attaining Him. (This is on the lines of **Pratardana Vidya**, of *Kaushitaki Upanishad* at 3, and *Brahma Sutra*, 1-1-29, in the "**Indrapranadhikarana**", which teaches that all other gods are but forms of the **One**, so as to constitute them as His Bodies, and Him as their in-dweller.)
- (ii) 'Protection' is in two ways: by granting what they desire - **ishta-prapti**, and by removal of what they feel as obstacles -**anishtanivritti**.

Now granting the 'desired' in this context means actually appearing visible to their naked, external eyes, and not through illusion or hallucination! They wouldn't wish even to wink their eyes for a second

o 9-22.

ⁿ *Desika* actually quotes from the **Gopika Gitam** of *Srimad Bhagavatam* when the cowherd damsel's lament: "Even a fraction of a second seems like an epoch or con, without spying you for even that small unit of time" - **Thrutir yugayate twamapasyatam** (*Bh.* 10-31-15). This is totally the opposite of *Madhva's* view, note.

for fear of loosing so much of the Vision.^a

- (iii) To reinforce the need on the part of God to actually stand before the devotees, **Ramanuja's** own comments at *Brahma Sutra* 1-1-21 are quoted!*
- (iv) Among the 'evils' of evil-doers, the worst is to cause harm, insult, injury, disrespect and disruption to the Devotees — called **Bhagavatapachara**.
- (v) Destroying such evil elements does not mean annihilating their souls or throwing them to eternal Hell as some would understand ; this is against God's nature, as He is good to even those that hate him, as the *Ramayana* says, (3-29) ; it is in the spirit of what Lord Rama tells **Ravana** through Angada (*Yuddhakanda*) to the effect : "I shall cleanse you through my shooting arrow to purify you." It is no more than the removal of an asuric body, a devilish inhabitation, which causes those evil acts and utterances through corresponding promptings. Did it not happen to **Sishupala**?

(The actual text of **Desika's** Gloss is too long to quote, and so the reader will please be contented with our summary here, and go back to the printed text for details of verification.)

IV. Here is a fourth instance. Please turn to (7-18) of our text. *Sri Krishna*, here, extolls a special type of his devotees that does not hanker after wealth, power, freedom from distress and special states of liberation 'without God', like 'Kaivalya'. These three — "Artha, Jijnasu and artharthi" — are great too, because, even for these ephemeral benefits they turn to God only, and not a substitute or lower power centres

* "Sadhus are seers & saints : protecting them is the primary purpose of the Avatara; removing evil-doers is only secondary. This latter can happen by His mere will."

of Divinity — minor gods. But the fourth one is extra-ordinary and rare, He does not seek anyone other than God as the object of his attainment, not any benefits through Him. God and nothing but God is his craving, for the sheer love of it, as a purpose beyond all perishable purposes. He is known as “paramaikanti” in Vaishnava parlance. Such a devotee is rare to attain even for Krishna, and is rare indeed so that Krishna calls him “His very soul”!

Now the question is : How can God have a soul above Him, as He is the soul of all, as **Vedanta** says? If this is an impossibility, what can be the meaning of Sri Krishna? Is it mere exaggeration empty of meaning or emphasis? Is it foolery? Magic of verbal jugglery? Literary experts, champions of literary excellence have a way of explaining this as **Rasokthi**, **Aupacharika**, words meant for another purpose and not to be taken seriously at literary face-value. But in philosophical words, meant for serious understanding where word-flourish is dangerous as it paves the way for misinterpretation, forgery, equivocation, perversion, perfidy, perjury and prejudice, literary techniques of oblique suggestions are dangerous, and nothing short of exact meanings can deliver intended meanings. Does such a meaning exist?

Shankara explains: “Such a ‘knower - devotee’ is my very soul in the sense that he is exceedingly dear to me.”* Nothing is dearer to a personality than its soul ; here Krishna’s soul means what is dear to Krishna.

Madhva is silent on this verse and this express statement of Krishna, for reasons that we cannot understand.

See **Ramanuja**’s explanation: “I depend for my

existence verily on such a devotee. Why? Because, just as he cannot exist without me for the endurance of his body and soul, I too cannot live without him. He is my very life-bearer. Therefore he is my very soul.”*

The idea can be explained thus: ‘atma’ or soul, is that without which a living thing cannot exist. Without a soul, a body can only be a corpse! Here God is reduced to such an undesirable state!

But again objections : “How can God be a “corpse” without a human soul, however dear it may be to Him? Does it mean that God and the human souls — even of such rare devotees — are mutually so interdependent ? Is the relation so non-reversible? Which Upanishad has ever stated so? Can there be anything above God? Is a devotee above God ?”

See **Desika’s** additional comments : “This meaning of Sri Krishna is such, and that will do here: Let it be or be not the meaning in **Vedanta** : (How?) **Atma** is in relation to a body its upholder, its sustainer.. **Atma** is characterised by qualities like being a base, a support.. Here the Jnani is one who bestows on me my essential nature”[■] Here is a praise of a devotee by God! What if it is not found as such in an **Upanishadic** text? After all **Upanishads** give us a vision of God, the other world, and means to it - **tatva**, **hita**, **purushartha** - as we say for the human beings - i.e., to us, from our human point of view. Rarely do *upanishads* tell us about how God views man, the devotees, and expects from

❖ Kasmadevam? Yasmadayam maya vina atmadharana sambhavanaya mameva anuttamam prapya masthitah; atah, tena vina mamapi atmadharanam na sambhavat | Tato mamatma hi sah ||

■ Asmin abhimanamatrasare bhavat siddhante kim pramanam abhimatam iti akankshayamaha.... ayamarthah trayyantasidhanto bhavatuva ma va Krishna siddhantastu ayamiti bhavah | Adharatvadivishesho hyatmalakshanamiti bhavah| Jnani tu mama svarupasattahetuh iti svabhaktastutiparah |

us, except in Causal contexts - **Srishti** texts. They say that creation happens out of mercy;[⊠] that evolution is for the betterment of life, towards Immortality, Perfection. This endowment is meaningful and is an end itself.

The text examined from *Gita* here is so crucial or vital to Ramanuja's thought — that the Acharya uses it to reinforce a very important idea, at the end of his *Brahma Sutra* Commentary called *Sri Bhashya*,[⊠] that — God cannot afford to turn down such a devotee back to cycles of sorrow and rebirth. The opponent's question is: "Where is the guarantee that God being omnipotent, and with none above Him to direct what He must do or not, does not turn down even the liberated ones?" One answer is: "**Sruti** so says and that is the guarantee." The other **Acharyas** are contextually faithful and stop at this. But **Ramanuja**, in addition to quoting the relevant texts *, adds this *Gita* verse as a further assurance by God, that a devotee so dear to Him cannot be turned down by even Him, except at the peril of losing His character and Identity! Such is the guarantee contained in the verse, and naturally the Commentary and the **tika** of **Desika** cannot be taken lightly! For Krishna to say that a **jnani** is His very soul is therefore no casual statement, just to induce others to love Him or to extoll one who loves him.

V. Here is a fifth instance for your perusal in the context of a similar guarantee that **Sri Krishna** will not allow His devotees to perish* Let us sum up the context and the imports

⊠ *Ch. Up* 6-3-2 : *Tait. Ananda* 6-2 ; *Ch.*: 6-2-3 - and so on.

⊠ 4-4-22

❖ *Br. Up.* : 8-2-15 & *Ch. Up.* 8-1

• *Gita* : ch 9. verses 29 to 34. (All the verses and all the words of the commentator of the author of the Gloss cannot be quoted here, as the write up is becoming already lengthy. Please read the original yourself.)

of crucial verses:

1. Verse 29 states that God treats all equally and has no preferences of any kind ; (in terms of caste, equirement of lores, approachability, sex, - adds Ramanuja.)
2. Verse 30 states that even the worst evil doer can attain Him if He can devotee Himself steadfastly, and comes back to the order of life, as prescribed by sages.
3. Verse 31 clarifies that such an erring soul retracing his lost staps can become a real devotee, is a question of time-duration that is not now important. What is important is that he is on the way to God. Hence a devotee shall not perish.
4. Verse 32 raises a common ignorant question, to answer it: the world of ignorant people believes that womenfolk, merchants and servants with no fixed duties are so born and condemned to these castes or states because of overwhelming sin to their discredit! So, is there any hope for them? Does the guarantee of verse 31 apply to them ?
5. Verse 33 fully answers this question with a banging affirmative. If is our view that Ramanuja's explanations are equally positive, emphatic, assuring, so as to bring out Sri Krishna's very inner meanings. See the contrasts of qualifications, limitations and distortion in other commentaries for yourself.

See how Desika reinforces Ramanuja's emphasis in such instances.

- (a) The nature of God's impartiality and reciprocal

love is such that this trust is like what you have between a father and son!²

- (b) What about womenfolk, the merchant community and the **Shudra** class? Desika says: “This mention of these categories by Krishna is not to be taken as His personal view that they belong to the sinning class, at all. He is merely summing up a general wrong notion prevalent among the unlearned and ignorant. He is disposing of this misconception even.”³

The verb ‘**Syuh**’ is very important as it implies a hypothetical case, as maintained by the opponent. This dispels the wrong notion that Sri Krishna himself considers them as sinners. “That may be your view! But even then, I shall liberate them, if they but take refuge in me” - this is the meaning.

VI. Come to this sixth instance in Chapter 11 of the Lord’s cosmic vision – Viswarupa : Arjuna sees the Lord’s ‘cosmic mouth’ as the Entrance to Death, annihilating all, on the warfield.

Here two different images are offered in the original, put in the mouth of Arjuna who is terror-struck to see that just like the enemy army of Kauravas led by Bhishma and Drona passing into that passage to Death, his own side of the Pandavas along with all their leaders and followers, is also being drawn into that Death-trap equally forcefully, ‘impartially’!⁴

☞ Stri vaishya shudranam paragati virodhitaya shankita karanuvada arthah | papayonishabdah | Tatra ye papa yonayorapi syuh iti anvayah ||

❖ Yatha nadinam bahavombu vegah samudrameva abhimukha dravanti | Tatha tavami naralokavirah vishanti vaktranyabhi vijjvalanti || (11-28) | Yatha pradipta jvalanam patangah vishanti nashaya samridha vegah | Tathaiva nashaya vishanti lokah tavapi vaktrani samridhavegah || (29)

The images must be deliberate in their use and the context. The revealer of the vision means obviously to convey to the confused and confounded Arjuna, a profound assurance of an order, some principle, some message about the ultimate fate of Good and Evil. Is that not the cause for the confusion or conflict in Arjuna's mind? If Good and Evil are both to be eliminated in the final reckoning, equally, without making a lasting difference here and beyond, in terms of values they lead to or represent, then what is the real difference between them? If they mean the same, why categorise them differently and tentatively or arbitrarily? What then happens to ethics or morality?

Unfortunately all the three Acharyas are silent on this crucial issue, as if they have not noticed these deliberately used images.♦

It is only **Desika** who has noticed it to draw a well founded answer; see how he explains both analogies :-

1. The rivers rush with one-pointed speed and unresistable direction towards the seas, and find eternal rest there, only after justifying their movement on the earth, wherever they flow, by usefulness in irrigation, enrichment of life in various ways, as being available for quenching thirst, washing animals, and for holy bath, ablutions and so on.

So also good people become useful wherever they live and move and function ; indeed we call them **tirthas** — 'purifiers' — for this very purpose. If they die at the end, it is only to join God, as an ultimate state of union with them, in the act of attainment of

♦ This means no disrespect to any of them, but only appreciates the special excellence of Desika's Gloss, without which this important aspect of the *Gita* would have been lost to the world.

perfection. There is therefore fulfilment here, expansion here, evolution here ; wastefulness is nowhere to be associated with this mode of Death. Nobody says that rivers 'die in the sea.' That is sheer perversion to say the least. It is so natural a phenomenon that *the Upanishads* seek to use it repeatedly as a symbol of salvation.* What is lost is finiteness of form, name, limited characteristics ; what is gained is Infinitude, Freedom and a State beyond misery, sorrow, misunderstanding.

2. The moths that attack the flame of a lamp also 'die' but in a different way ; They rush to the lamp, ignorantly, in speed, mistaking the flame for fruit, not realising that it will burn them. This is imperfect Death; attacking 'light' is devilish, unfruitful to moths or anybody. The **Asuri** people die this way, harming the world and also themselves, gaining no self-realisation. How can the two 'deaths' be the same? Who can equate them? The mute misgiving of Arjuna is answered in a silent 'vision' revealed to him without an oral commentary by the Lord. So here is **Desika's** gloss extraordinarily useful to us.* This is not all! There are other implication drawn from these very analogies, here alone :

- (a) The rivers are returned into the same material, water, as the sea ; but the moths become ashes! Differences are obvious.

❖ Yatha nadyah syandamanah samud're astam gacchanti nama rupe vihaya |
Tatha vidvan namarupad vimuktah paratparam purushamupanti divyam
(Mundaka 3-2-8)

❧ Nadipravahasya nasho nama prathagbhuta pravahakaratyagah ; yena nadipravah
vyapadeshah tasminneva dravye nivartate | patanganantu dravyantara
vyapadesha yogya bhasmatadi apattih iti prakarabhedha darshanaya
drishtantadyaya abhidhanam |

- (b) The flow the river is not what is under the control of the river. But for the moth it is self-induced towards self-destruction. (God claims the Good towards Him; the Evil ones rush only to be crushed, by their unenlightened initiatives. The difference is clear.)
- (c) In spite of all manners of Good and Evil entering Him, God reveals two ways of absorbing them, nevertheless, differently. God shelters all the Good, reaching no saturation, and turning away none to their disappointment, so as to say - 'I am sorry, I am full ; so get out.' He is the all-refuge, always, for all Good. That is the meaning of the sea-image. But so far as Evil is concerned, He destroys it then and there allowing no room, no shelter, no patience, and not even entertaining them. That is how moths die futile deaths.*



❖ Yadva, svecchaya nivarthitum ashakyamityevam abhiprayah pravaha drishtantah | Tathavidhasya vinashasya sveccha mula vyaparahetukatva vyanjanaya patanga drishtantah | Ishvarasyapi cha sarvapraveshe api aparipurnatva vivakshaya samudra nidarshanam | Sahasa vidhvamsanaya tu jvalanoduharanam ||

CONCLUSION

Lots of great scholars have written masterly treatises on the **Gita** and **Sri Ramanuja's** Commentary on it. Prof. Rangacharya's lectures (in 3 volumes, comprising some 86 lectures) is now available, I learn, in reprint. Alkondavilli Govindacharya's work is there. Among Westerners Dr. J.A.B. Van Binterin's masterly analysis, and restoration of balance in the estimate of the Acharya's Commentary is there. W.P. Hill's work of the late 1980^s is there to give us a comparative estimate in favour of **Ramanuja's** work. Prof. S.S. Raghavachar of Mysore University has left us a good and useful monograph behind him, dedicating the work to an incisive analysis of the concepts that **Ramanuja** has touched upon. Swami Adidevananda Maharaj's translation of **Ramanuja's Gita Bhashyam** with useful notes is very helpful in understanding the spirit of the Acharya. Dr. M.R. Sampathkumaran's similar translation of the Bhashya into English with copious notes from **Tatparya Chandrika** of Desika is a valuable addition to this series. There are similar works in Tamil, Kannada and Hindi also.

My humble efforts herein are towards promoting a healthy, positive and balanced approach towards the philosophy of *Gita* itself in the main, and to show **Ramanuja** as a dependable guide to the understanding or unravelling of this treasure, his specialities, in the next step; and further to promote a well deserved love towards **Desika's** Gloss, and a greater interest in this exceptionally great work of thought

and art. I have therefore called it a mere 'Introduction'. Readers will do well to follow it up with a detailed study of *Gita*, and the **Acharya's** *Bhashya*, and **Desika's** *Gloss* in any edition mentioned above, or available for themselves. Introductions are meant to be brief, and this 'length' may be treated as such. This was written for another purpose, and it will serve in that role too, perhaps for another readership. This edition is for the more general intellectual readers, specialists in science, technology, industry, commerce, and other areas, who are showing great interest in our Hindu values, books that expound them, and particularly classics like the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, of late, and have better advantages in being free from prejudices, being more receptive, more open minded, and endowed with more angles to see and realise Truth, as many readers till of late did not have and, so locked up in beaten tracks, worn out grooves, and in what I may call with regret, the 'medieval outlook'. The *Gita* is simply not a book of the 'other world', a routine addition to what is already there plentifully in the past. It sums up the entire Hindu thought with novel insights and openings for all the future, at once. This aspect is sought to be emphasised in this monograph, and a fresh initiative is launched here to draw your unprejudiced attention towards the understanding of **Ramanuja's** and **Desika's** approach.

Sri Mahesha Hiregange of Akruti Printers of Gokarna and my esteemed friend Sri S. Ramasesha Sharma have helped in arranging the layout and proof reading with patience and devotion. I thank them heartily.

May the elders bless us all.



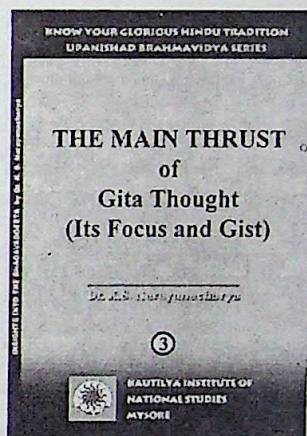
For further Reading

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- *Vedanta Desika* Madras
(Tamil verses)
16. *Gita with* Gita Press, Gorakhpur
Ramanuja Bhashya
- *Hindi Translation*
17. *Gita with* Gita Press, Gorakhpur
Shankara Bhashya
- *Hindi Translation*
18. *Gita with* Pub: Ubhaya Vedanta
Ramanuja Bhashya & Grantha Mala,
Tatparya Chandrika Madras
of Desika



Please await our next publication
in the present series



The *Gita* has, somehow, all along, been understood and interpreted by Commentators, both ancient and modern, as a Book meant for **Moksha**, or final Salvation. This has tended unfortunately in a tragic reversal of its main ideas, its chief flow and the main emphasis of all Hindu thought, as the *Gita* is supposed to be a handbook of all **Vedic, Upanishadic** thought, and a primer of Hindu approach to life. Westerners have often dubbed our contribution to world-thought as 'other worldly', for this reason, perhaps mistaking all Hindu metaphysics for **Buddhist, Jain and Sankhyan** thought systems. This has resulted in a grand or colossal loss of self-direction and motive-force to our Hindu people all through our 'medieval ages' during Greek, Islamic and Christian conquests. We are yet to emerge out of this tunnel of darkness! We do not realise that the *Gita* is a hand book of daily conduct, a code book aimed at building character, investing life with a purpose and endowing it with a God-

given motive of life's blossoming up, a divine evolution to full fruition, '**Atma Vikasa**', '**Atma Uddhara**' i.e., the elevation of man to his due Immortality in terms of achievement of Perfection, in a dynamic process guided by God. We tend to look at life as an unfortunate fall from an imaginary initial perfection! This is the mischievous **Sankhyan** concept haunting us even today though the *Mahabharatha*, the *Brahma Sutra*, and the *Upanishads* have successfully disproved such false propaganda in debates with unquestionable arguments! Alas, we do not turn to these texts! We forget Sage **Yajnavalkya**'s emphasis of life's direction as from "Chaos to Order, from Darkness to Light, and from Death to Immortality," in an unforgettable utterance:

Asato ma Sadgamaya

Tamaso ma Jyotirgamaya

Mrityorma Amritam Gamaya.

We tend, unfortunately, to interpret this also as an escape from 'Life as illusion' into a Nihil as Immortality, under **Buddhist** habits of mind!

Our present booklet tries to dispel this harmful approach, by summing up the main ideas of each Chapter in the *Gita*, as briefly as possible, connecting them all in a grand chain of the central-theme, running all through, and explicating in detail only what is complex but has been made 'complicated' by extravagant directionless, and wasteful interpretations abounding in markets, today!

Our Next Two Books will be

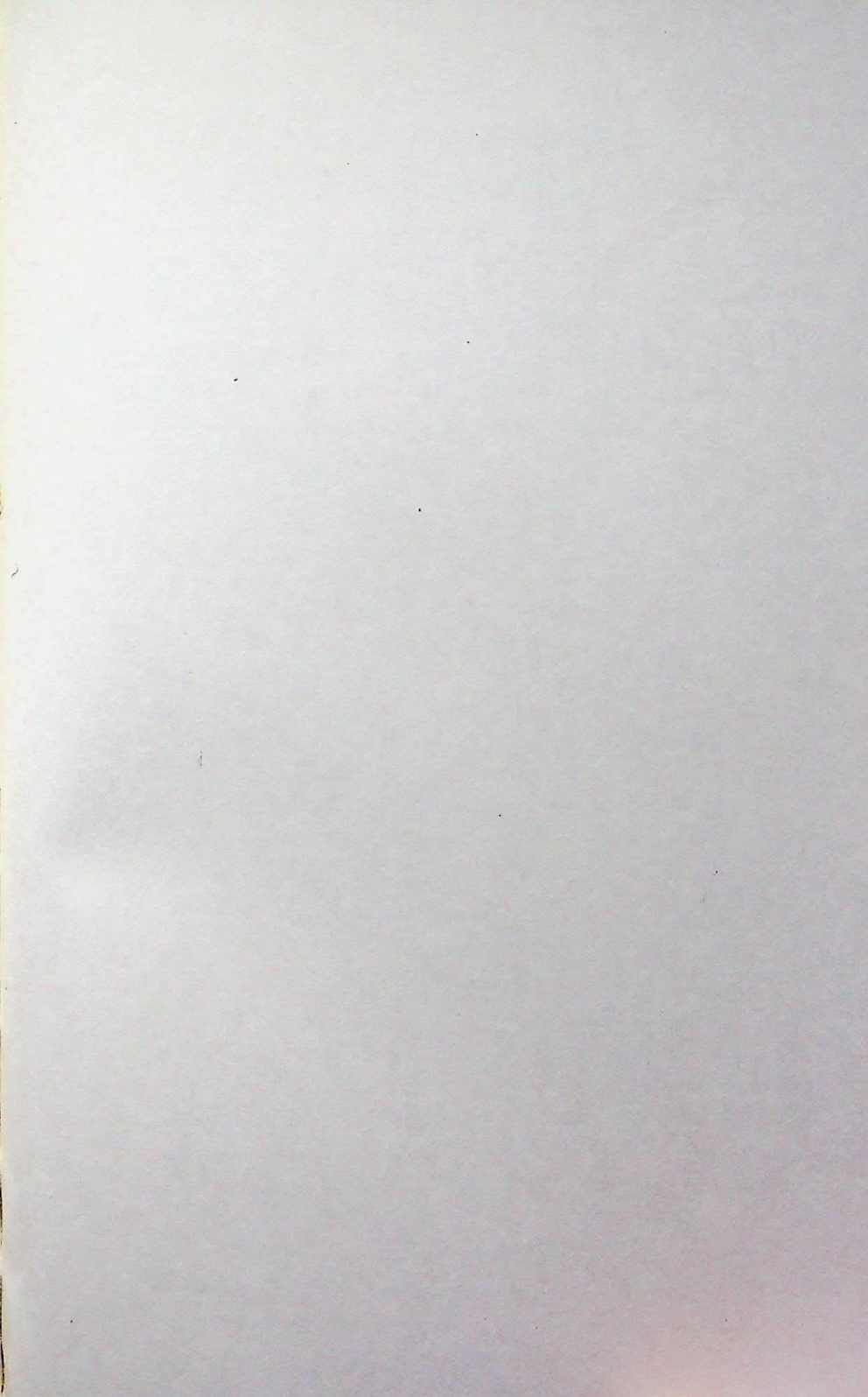
1. *Insights into the Chandogya Upanishad*
2. *Insights into the Mandokya Upanishad*

(Matter is already in the Press)

SRI AUROBINDO ON OUR EXPECTATIONS FROM THE GITA

"The world abounds us with scriptures sacred and profane, with revelations and half-revelations, with religions and philosophies, sects and schools and systems. To these the many minds of a half-ripe knowledge or no knowledge at all attach themselves with exclusiveness and passion and will have it that this or the other book is alone the eternal Word of God and all others are either impostures or at best imperfectly inspired, that this or that philosophy is the last word of the reasoning intellect and other systems are either errors or saved only by such partial truth in them as links them to the one true philosophical cult. Even the discoveries of physical Science have been elevated into a creed and in its name religion and spirituality banned as ignorance and superstition, philosophy as flippery and moonshine. And to these bigoted exclusions and vain wranglings even the wise have often been them-selves, misled by some spirit of darkness that has mingled with their light and overshadowed it with some cloud of intellectual egoism or spiritual pride. Mankind seems now indeed inclined to grow a little modester and wiser; we no longer slay our fellows in the name of God's truth or because they have minds differently trained or differently constituted from ours; we are less ready to curse and revile our neighbour because he is wicked or presumptuous enough to differ from us in opinion; we are ready even to admit that Truth is everywhere and cannot be our sole monopoly; we are beginning to look at other religions and philosophies for the truth and help they contain and no longer merely in order to damn them as false or criticise what we conceive to be their errors. But we are still apt to declare that our truth gives us *the* supreme knowledge which other religions or philosophies have missed or only imperfectly grasped so that they deal either with subsidiary and inferior aspects of the truth of things or can merely prepare less evolved minds for the heights to which we have arrived. And we are still prone to force upon ourselves or others the whole sacred mass of the book or gospel we admire, insisting that all shall be accepted as eternally valid truth and no-iota or underline or diaeresis denied its part of the plenary inspiration.

It may therefore be useful in approaching an ancient Scripture, such as the Veda, Upanishads or Gita, to indicate precisely the spirit in which we approach it and what exactly we think we may derive from it that is of value to humanity and its future. First of all, there is undoubtedly a Truth, one and eternal which we are seeking, from which all other truth derives, by the light of which all other truth finds its right place, explanation and relation to the scheme of knowledge. But precisely for that reason it cannot be shut up in a single trenchant formula, it is not likely to be found in its entirety or in all its bearings in any single philosophy or scripture or uttered altogether and for ever by any one teacher, thinker, prophet or Avatar. Nor has it been wholly found by us if our view of it necessitates the incoherent exclusion of the truth underlying other systems, for when we reject passionately, we mean simply that we cannot appreciate and explain. Secondly, this Truth, though it is one and eternal exposes itself in Time and through the mind of man; therefore every Scripture must necessarily contain two elements, one temporary, perishable belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced, the other eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries. Moreover, in the statement of the Truth the actual form given to it, the system and arrangement, the metaphysical and intellectual mould, the precise expression used must be largely subject to the mutations of Time and cease to have the same force; for the human intellect modifies itself always; continually dividing and putting together it is obliged to shift its divisions continually and to rearrange its syntheses; it is always leaving old expressions and symbols for new or, if it uses the old, it so changes its connotation or at least its exact content and association that we can never be quite sure of understanding an ancient book of this kind precisely in the sense and spirit it bore to its contemporaries. What is of entirely permanent value is that which besides being universal has been experienced, lived and seen with a higher than the intellectual vision."



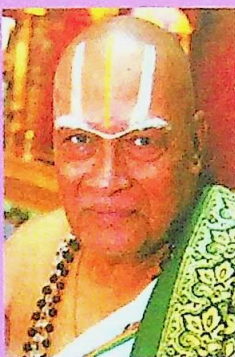
Sri Aurobindo's Quest for Sanatana Dharma

"I seek a light that shall be new, yet old, the oldest indeed of all lights. I seek an authority that accepting, illuminating and reconciling all human truths, shall yet reject and get rid of by explaining it all mere human error. I seek a text and a Shastra that is not subject to interpolation, modification and replacement, that moth and white ant cannot destroy, that the earth cannot bury nor time mutilate. I seek an asceticism that shall give me purity and deliverance from self and from ignorance without stultifying God and his universe. I seek a scepticism that shall question everything but shall have the patience to deny nothing that may possibly be true. I seek a rationalism not proceeding on the untenable supposition that all the centuries of man's history except the nineteenth were centuries of folly and superstition, but bent upon discovering truth instead of limiting inquiry by a new dogmatism, obscurantism and furious intolerance which it chooses to call common sense and enlightenment; I seek a materialism that shall recognise matter and use it without being its slave. I seek an occultism that shall bring out all its processes and proofs into the light of day, without mystery, without jugglery, without the old stupid call to humanity, 'Be blind, O man, and see!' *In short, I seek not science, not religion, not Theosophy, but the Veda - the truth about Brahman, not only about His essentiality, but about His manifestation, not a lamp on the way to the forest, but a light and guide to joy and action in the world, the truth which is beyond opinion, the knowledge that all thought strives after. I believe the Veda to be the foundation of the Sanatana Dharma. I believe it to be the concealed divinity within Hinduism.*"

(From *Essays Divine and Human*, p.65 from the Ch. *Hinduism and the Mission of India*, Centenary Vol. No. 13)

About the Author

Born in 1933, and educated at Mysore, (Maharaja's College and Yuvaraja's College), Sri K.S. Narayanacharya, popularly known as Ramayanacharya, is a B.Sc. (P.C.M), B.A. (Hons) English, and M.A. (Modern English Literature) coming from an orthodox and devout family of Vedic scholars. His Doctoral thesis is on "The Influence of India thought" on the



poetry of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. He has studied the Krishna Yajurveda under the guidance of great masters like the late Dandavati Siva Dixit Somayaji of Dharwad, where he has worked as Professor and Principal of the famed Karnataka Arts College, Karnatak University, for over 32 years as a teacher of English literature. Author of over 130 works in Kannada and English on varied subjects like the *Vedas*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, *Bhagavata*, the *Hymns of Alwars*, *Vedanta*, *Haridasa literature*, *D.R. Bendre*, and *Kautilya*, Sri Acharya is a recipient of several State awards like Sangeetha Nritya Academy's 'Karnataka Kala Sri', the Sahitya Academy prize, 'Gamaka Rathnakara' from the State Government, and titles from Religious Heads, like *Veda Bhushana*, *Valmiki Hridayajna*, *Pravachana Kalanidhi* and so on. Music, Indology, poetry, discourses, lecture-tours are among the abounding interests of the Acharya. He is an invincible debater and a passionate advocate of Hindu values as lasting solutions for the maladies of our society. He is a novelist too, turning our Epics into popular moulds of fiction. His serials in the Kannada weeklies like *Tharanga* and *Karmavira* are very popular and run for months at a stretch. The Acharya is a master of English, Kannada, Sanskrit and Tamil and has lectured all over the country.

For his services to Indian literature and spirituality through works, speech and discourses, the Karnataka State Open University, Mysore has awarded him recently (18th, March, 2005) an Hon D. Litt. degree. Karnataka State Government has conferred on him the Rajyotsava Prashasthi in 2008.